Building a brotherhood? A teacher researcher's study of gender construction at an all-boys Catholic secondary school

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BUILDING A BROTHERHOOD?
A TEACHER RESEARCHER’S STUDY OF GENDER CONSTRUCTION
AT AN ALL-BOYS CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL

Dissertation
by
KIRSTIN PESOLA McEACHERN

submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

BUILDING A BROTHERHOOD?
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AT AN ALL-BOYS CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL

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Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Marilyn Cochran-Smith

Despite renewed interest in single-sex education, these classrooms remain relatively unstudied, even in Catholic schools, which have a long history of single-sex education. Although there are over 460 single-gendered, Catholic K-12 schools in the United States, which educate roughly 215,000 students (McDonald & Schultz, 2011), these schools are often ignored in educational research. Practitioner research in this area is almost nonexistent, yet it can generate and disseminate insider knowledge that directly improves the educational sites from which it emerges.

For the past 11 years, I have taught English at “St. Albert’s Preparatory School,” an all-boys suburban secondary school serving over 1,100 students in the Northeast. The school regularly speaks of fostering a brotherhood among the students, and I see evidence of this on a daily basis. However, St. Albert’s has not always been an easy place to work. My own experience is consistent with research studies that have found all-boys schools to be more sexist environments than all-girls schools (Lee, Marks, & Byrd, 1994) where
students generally afford their female teachers less respect than their male teachers (Keddie, 2007; Keddie & Mills, 2007; Robinson, 2000).

Based on my experiences as a female teacher at this school, I conducted a teacher research study on how my students and I constructed gender in the context of our English classroom. Drawing on a wealth of qualitative data sources, this study builds three main arguments: the school community built a brotherhood in part by engaging in silence and othering; the all-boys environment acted as a double-edged sword in that it contributed to a comfortable setting for the students to explore gender issues, but it also encouraged the students to shed their unique, multi-faceted masculinities and enact hegemonic gendered behavior that perpetuated an unjust order; and though I was well versed in issues of gender equity, I, too, was affected by the all-boys classroom space and contributed to the hegemonic gender order at the school.
Dedication

In some ways, I started this journey for my father.
In some ways, I finished it for my mother and my husband.
I dedicate this dissertation to all three of them.

To Dad,
Though you are not here to read it, I did finally write a book,
and I think you’d find it pretty interesting.

To my mother, Joni,
who laid the foundation for my feminist stance
long before I knew what one was…

And to my husband, Brendan,
who gave me the support to build upon it.
Acknowledgements

My work in this doctoral program, culminating in the completion of this dissertation, would not have been possible without the sacrifices and support of many people.

First, to the one who sacrificed the most, my husband, Brendan. Thank you for holding down the fort, raising our children, feeding and walking our dogs, letting me take off for conference presentations and writing weekends, and for never, ever pointing out all that you were doing so that I could do this. If Janis Joplin is correct, and “all you ever gotta do is be a good man, one time, to one woman,” then this is the end of the road, babe! Your love and support amazes and humbles me.

To my children, Avery Finn and Owen Thomas, for inspiring me to work toward a better, more just world, and for pulling no punches when reminding me what was at stake when I considered quitting. You were right; your mother is not a quitter. Remember that neither are you.

To my mother, Joni Pesola, for her company on my conference trips and for asking the question in Vancouver, “What happened to you?” which served as a necessary wake-up call for me to look at the ways in which St. Albert’s had changed me. Sometimes, your honesty is just what I need.

To my sister, Kara Pesola, and her husband, Scott Booth, for knowing when to listen to my philosophical musings, grad school rants, and classroom stories, and when to push back. I love our family unit, and you two add so much to the supportive dynamic.

To my family friend and honorary aunt, Colleen Kigin, for her keen editing eye and willingness to read this long missive. I appreciate your comments and patience, especially since you did not have the option of reading the ending first!

To my fellow gender and single-sex education researcher, Dr. Howard Glasser, for our many conversations on these topics. I am grateful to have you in my professional network and happy to call you a colleague.

To my advisor, Marilyn Cochran-Smith, for encouraging me to pursue research in single-sex education from my first doctoral class, and continuing to acknowledge the value of this work to the end. More importantly, she nudged me to switch to a different pair of glasses when mine were too foggy or too rosy. I will be forever grateful for your guidance and your uncanny ability to know when to push me harder and when to pull back on the reigns.
To my committee member, Audrey Friedman, for her humor, pep talks, astute comments about my tone, and for recommending I talk to Jim Mahalik. You were the one to tell me I was accepted into the program, and I am honored you were there when I finished; English teachers like symmetry!

To my committee member, Jim Mahalik, for his expertise in masculinity and for guiding me in his gentle way to look at fascinating works I would have not have found in the realm of teacher education. Every time I talked to you, it felt like an academic bear hug that encouraged me to move forward.

To Amy Ryan, for serving so many roles for me over the course of my program, including boss, mentor, colleague, Dead Dad counselor, job contract negotiator, and friend. I don’t know how you switched hats so effortlessly (sometimes in the same conversation), but I consider you one of the angels sent to guide me.

To my fellow Phenomenal Hot-tubbin’ Dissertators, Lianna Pizzo and Christine Power, for befriending me at the start and supporting me to the end. Lianna was particularly helpful with putting the bumps in the road in perspective and for giving me tastes of my own medicine. Christine was great company during our weekend writing retreats at the end, and our check-ins over dinner, hot-tubbing, and drinks were the pushes I needed to keep going and stay productive. I am so glad we were all in the same cohort.

To my BC cohort members, especially Matt Welch, as well as those ahead of me, especially Renee Greenfield and Kara Mitchell, for their humor, spot-on advice and encouragement through this process. Your dissertation defenses inspired me!

To Liz Mastrangelo, for commiserating over the difficulties of juggling motherhood, graduate school, teaching, writing, photo shoots, and concert-going. I value your friendship and support more than you know.

To Tom Newkirk, for suggesting I pursue a Ph.D., and to Ed Hardiman for seconding that notion. They, along with Holli Levitsky, wrote my letters of recommendation for the doctoral program. I thank you all for saying something nice and for not being surprised when I was accepted.

To the many supportive faculty and staff members at St. Albert’s, including all the faculty members who sat for interviews with me in 2008, and the many who have inquired about my progress along the way. In particular, Jennifer Jones was always willing to give me work space or take my class when I needed it, and Amir Ghali brought my computer back to life more than once throughout the dissertation process.
To the administrative team at St. Albert’s, for having my back throughout this process, from reducing my teaching load while I took classes full time and giving me schedule flexibility to finish my writing, to praying for me, especially when I didn’t ask for it. I am fortunate to work with such supportive, kind-hearted people.

Finally, to my English students, whose eager participation in this study made me obligated to finish it! I am particularly grateful for your candor and for motivating me to do my best day in and day out. I especially thank the focal students, Chris, Dane, Stokely, and Topher, for showing me the many facets of masculinity my students bring to the classroom everyday. I hold you all dear to my heart.
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Chapter One
Welcome to His-land: Make Your Own Map

“Women in a male-dominated organization may become expert observers of the male culture as they navigate their day-to-day interactions with colleagues... because their survival is dependent on knowing the culture of [men]. The dominant group is under no equivalent obligation.”
(Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 44)

I first read Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* (1999) when I was preparing to teach an Introduction to Fiction course at Loyola Marymount University (LMU) in the spring of 2001. As a new Teaching Fellow who loved Gilman’s oft-anthologized short story “The Yellow Wall-Paper,” I was excited to discover that she also wrote a novella that fit perfectly into the syllabus for my course, which concentrated on Utopic/Dystopic literature. The story focuses on three male explorers who set out to visit a rumored all-female society, though others warn them that “it [is] no place for men” (Gilman, 1999, p. 4). The men interact with Herland’s female inhabitants with varying degrees of success, and in the end, one stays, one is expelled, and the third man – the narrator of the story – leaves voluntarily at the urging of a woman who wants to visit the United States with him.

When I taught the story in LMU’s fiction course, I had no way of knowing that Gilman’s feminist novella would serve as an allegory for my own experience just two years later when I returned to my hometown to teach at the all-boys, Catholic secondary
school, St. Albert’s,\(^1\) whose admission policy states is no place for women (students), a sentiment that I often felt extended to me as a female teacher.

Unlike *Herland*’s male explorers, though, I did not intentionally set out to discover a single-sex world. After living in Los Angeles for five years, and having recently had our first child, my husband and I decided it was time to move back home, so I sent resumes to all the schools in the area. My letter of interest to St. Albert’s had a more personal touch, however; though non-practicing since my confirmation, I played up my Catholic upbringing, touted my husband’s alumni status, and had a family friend who had been teaching math at the school for a decade hand deliver it to the English department chair. Within a month, I had two phone interviews, and they hired me. After I made the employment and my cross-country move official by signing St. Albert’s contract and buying a house a mile from campus, the family friend who would soon be my colleague told me that I should probably “dress like a nun” given that I was so young (24), and the boys would be attracted to me. I soon learned that the impetus for her comments was another recently hired young female teacher who did not dress (nor act) like a nun; she was “dismissed” halfway through my first year at St. Albert’s.

Also unlike *Herland*’s explorers, I had prior knowledge of the land before my expedition began in the fall of 2003. I grew up a few miles from the campus in a town that had always held the school in high regard. The school regularly made headlines for its athletic prowess, and its curriculum had a reputation for rigor. As a middle school

\(^{1}\) The school’s name and the names of students and faculty members are pseudonyms. Identifying details have also been changed.
student, I said goodbye to some of the top-ranked boys when they left our town’s public 
system to attend St. Albert’s, further solidifying its academic reputation for those of us 
matriculating to the public high school. At the start of high school, I attended some of 
the school’s dances; by the end of high school, I was part of my school’s drama guild, 
and the rival St. Albert’s was the team to beat. Perhaps my closest association with St. 
Albert’s, however, is the status I mentioned earlier: I married one of its graduates. Thus, 
I was known at the school not only as a teacher but also as the wife of an alumnus, 
working alongside many of my husband’s former teachers. In short, my prior knowledge 
of the school came from the point of view of a student who revered the school’s 
reputation and, by extension, its student body, and, later, as a wife who has had to 
entertain her husband’s occasional trips down memory lane.

However, these perspectives did little to prepare me for the role I came to have at 
the school, and in this way, I liken myself to the Herland explorers who ventured into 
uncharted territory and had to find their own ways. Like them, I, too, meet with varying 
degrees of success, and that success often depends on the day: sometimes I am Jeff, the 
romantic with rose-colored glasses, content to spend my entire life among the inhabitants 
of this strange village that is St. Albert’s; other days, I am Terry, the pessimist, failing 
miserably to fit in and accept the values of this new culture; and most of the time, I am 
Van, the sociologist, soaking it all in, keeping my impressions to myself, often in written 
form via my teacher journal, and chalking my tenure at St Albert’s up to a learning 
experience.
St. Albert’s School: A Teacher’s Perspective

I have played the part of Van in recent years by examining the school and my experiences through a researcher’s lens. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) explain, “when teachers do research, they draw on interpretive frameworks built from their histories and intellectual interests, and because the research process is embedded in practice, the relationship between knower and known is significantly altered” (p. 43). As a teacher at the all-boys St. Albert’s, I have an “intellectual interest” in the value of single-sex education and have explored this interest throughout the research I engaged in during my doctoral studies. The literature I have read points to mixed results, which I discuss further in my review of the research in Chapter 2, and my teaching practice also leaves me conflicted about the value of single-sex education for boys.

I arrived at St. Albert’s a young, inexperienced teacher, but I believed the three years I had spent in classrooms – at the middle, secondary, and post-secondary levels – gave me enough of a background to know what I was doing. I had no reason to think teaching at the single-sex St. Albert’s would be drastically different from teaching at The Buckley School, the coed K-12 private school I taught at in Los Angeles, or the coed Catholic Loyola Marymount University. I was wrong.

I enjoy teaching at St. Albert’s. The school regularly speaks of fostering a brotherhood, and I see evidence of this on an almost daily basis, from students carrying injured peers’ backpacks to bear-hugging each other in the halls. The boys seem to be generally accepting of each other regardless of their diverse interests and abilities. While
the football captain and the star of the high school play are not necessarily best friends, my impression is that there are fewer cliques than existed at my own coed high school or the coed K-12 school at which I taught before St. Albert’s. St. Albert’s students continually affirm my observations in my conversations with them. In addition, several gay students have come out to me over the years, and all have told me that they felt comfortable doing so at St. Albert’s, probably more so than they would have felt at a coed school. The graduates with whom I still keep in contact talk of the school fondly, and I know there are students for whom the school truly enriches their lives. For these reasons, it is often easy for me to adopt the viewpoint of Herland character Jeff, who is accepting of the new world he inhabits and is content to remain there.

However, St. Albert’s has not always been an easy place to work. My own experience has been consistent with research studies that have found all-boys schools to be more sexist environments than all-girls schools (Lee et al., 1994) where students generally afforded their female teachers less respect than their male teachers (Keddie, 2007; Keddie & Mills, 2007; Robinson, 2000). In my experience at St. Albert’s, the underlying current at the school was that, at best, females were “the other” (de Beauvoir, 2004), and, at worst, “less than.” I have noticed that the culture of St. Albert’s confirmed this message in various explicit and implicit ways, from the admissions policy that prohibited girls from applying to the lack of female administrators making the important decisions that affected the school.² The teaching faculty was predominantly male, which,

² It is important to note that the number of female administrators quadrupled from the time I began this study to the current 2013-2014 school year, including my hire as the Assistant Principal for Academics,
at times, seemed to contribute to what Latham (1998) deemed “the locker room subculture” (p. 180). In her research in six Australian high schools, Robinson (2000) uncovered the sexual harassment that female teachers experience regularly from their male students. Lee, Marks and Byrd (1994) observed coed, all-girls’, and all-boys’ independent secondary schools to study how the socialization to gender operated in the different environments. They found that most “incidents of sexism” that occurred in the classroom were initiated by a teacher, with the “severest form” of sexism occurring in all-boys’ classrooms, “particularly in those with male teachers” (p. 113). Indeed, while I have not witnessed it in a while, when I first came to the school as a teacher, it was not uncommon to hear boys talk in between classes about what they did to their girlfriends over the weekend or refer to female teachers as “bitches” while male faculty members within earshot said nothing. Though I am a woman and had been teaching for a few years, it was not until I came to St. Albert’s that I started thinking of myself as a female teacher, and I was aware this label was not one that came with many benefits. My experience at the school is not unique; years ago, women faculty formed a now defunct group that gathered a few times a year to discuss the trials and tribulations of working at St. Albert’s, and all shared these observations. For these reasons, I have often adopted *Herland* character Terry’s view of this single-sex world, one of disdain and disbelief.

Based on my eleven-year tenure as a female English and journalism teacher at this institution, I worried that if the bias against women that I perceived at St. Albert’s was

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Grades 9 and 10. I address how this role change for me, and culture change for the school, has affected my study in later chapters.
left unchallenged, graduates would enter the coeducational world with grossly distorted views and understandings of the “other” sex and of themselves. As Martin (1991) explains,

Beginning with the twin assumptions that to be a female of the human species is to be a woman and to be an educated human being is to be a man, and adding to these the truism that a man is not a woman, the argument leads inexorably to the conclusion that to be an educated female human being is to be and not to be a woman – a contradiction if there ever were one. (p. 8)

Following this line of reasoning, it would not be surprising if St. Albert’s students viewed “educated women” as somewhat of a contradiction in terms because the school consistently seemed to convey the message that females did not have a justifiable place at this prestigious institution.

Another cultural bias that I believe went unchecked at St. Albert’s was the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity. A concept that originated in the 1980s, hegemonic masculinity is best defined as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell, 2005, p. 77). Both men and women have roles in this “gender practice,” but at St. Albert’s, the male teachers generally policed this practice in particular ways. Martino & Frank (2006) wrote,

consistent with previous research on male teachers undertaken by King (2000), Skelton (2001) and Sargent (2001), which illustrates that male teachers are incited to emphasize a heterosexualized masculinity within a regulatory regime or apparatus of surveillance dictated and supported by the school and broader community…[an all-boys school often] legitimates and authorizes particular versions of hegemonic heterosexualized masculinity. (p. 18)
I have witnessed many examples of the communication of hegemonic heterosexualized masculinity to the school community, from the heavy emphasis St. Albert’s placed on its sports teams to the superlatives listed in the yearbook, one of which named the student “most likely to impose his will on others.” As Connell (2005) points out, such limited visions of what kind of masculinity is considered “acceptable” ultimately damages us all.

My adult, gendered experience of navigating the complex, single-sex world of St. Albert’s led me to wonder how my less-experienced adolescent students found their ways through (and within) the masculine environment at the school and what effects their single-sex schooling experience had on them and their constructions of gender. Though I was too young and naïve to do so at the time of my hire, had I looked to literature on single-sex schools to prepare me for the environment I was about to enter, I would have been disappointed.

**Single-Sex Education as a Way to Address Differences**

Advocates for all-girls schools cite girls’ increased leadership opportunities, higher graduation rates, and the lack of competition for teachers’ attention as key reasons for educating girls separately (e.g., Crombie, Abarbanel, & Trinneer, 2002; Derry & Phillips, 2004; Hoffmann, 2002; Jimenez & Lockheed, 1989; Lee, 2002; Rennie & Parker, 1997; Shapka & Keating, 2003; Streitmatter, 1998; Warrington & Younger, 2001; Watson, Quatman, & Edler, 2002). However, the conversations advocating for all-boys schools often are not as noble.
If we believe the titles of best-selling books, boys in the United States are in “trouble” (Tyre, 2008), set “adrift” and left “unmotivated” (Sax, 2007) by a failing educational system that is leaving them behind (Gurian, 2005; Whitmire, 2010). They need to be “protected” (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000), “rescued” even (Pollack, 1999), in this “war” that “misguided” feminists have waged against them (Sommers, 2000).

This focus on boys’ emotional and academic needs marks a departure from the attention researchers paid to girls in the 1990s, prompted in part by the American Association of University Women’s (AAUW) (1992) report, “How Schools Shortchange Girls.” Even Sadker and Sadker (1994), whose seminal book Failing at Fairness echoed the AAUW’s points, revised their stance in an updated edition; their first book focused on how “schools cheat girls,” but their more recent edition chronicles “how gender bias cheats girls and boys” (D. Sadker, Sadker, & Zittleman, 2009; emphasis added), a slight but important distinction. Some have taken the discussion of gender bias in another direction, citing the “emerging science of sex differences” (Sax, 2006) to support the idea that male and female brains are wired differently, suggesting boys and girls should be educated separately. As Keddie and Mills (2007) rightly acknowledge, most arguments used in favor of single-sex education for boys are highly troublesome in the ways in which they have negated the unequal distribution of power between men and women, have been silent on gender differences in post-school options, have ignored issues of sexual harassment in schools, have reinforced dominant constructions of masculinity that are harmful to boys themselves (and also to others), and have treated boys and girls as unitary groups unaffected by issues of class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and physical abilities. (pp. 1-2)
Relying on gender stereotypes or using the gains girls have made in certain subjects such as science and math as justification for boys-only schooling is dangerous and counter-productive. This is not to suggest, however, that single-sex education for boys is not warranted or that special considerations are not needed when educating boys. In fact, the attention on boys and their unique needs have prompted many to argue that teachers need to use different pedagogical strategies with the different sexes (e.g., Gurian, 2001; James, 2007; Keddie & Mills, 2007; Martino & Mellor, 2000; Neu & Weinfeld, 2007; Reichert & Hawley, 2010), renewing interest in single-sex schooling as a potential way to address these differences (Salomone, 2006).

The resurgence of public, single-sex education was prompted in part by The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 §5131, which states: “Funds made available to local educational agencies under section 5112 shall be used for innovative assistance programs, which may include…programs to provide same-gender schools and classrooms (consistent with applicable law)” (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). On October 24, 2006, then U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings announced new regulations that amend Title IX’s restrictions, making it easier for public schools to extend same-sex offerings to students and parents who desire them. Under the new rules, single-sex classes can be created as long as they are “substantially related to the achievement of an important objective such as improving the educational achievement of students, providing diverse educational opportunities or meeting the particular, identified needs of

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3 It is important to note the dates on the literature in this body of work. I began teaching at St. Albert’s in 2003, and much of the work on single-sex schooling (and boys) was published after I entered the classroom.
students” (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Schools are taking advantage of this opportunity; although there were 4 public schools with single-sex offerings on record in 1998 (Dee, 2006), there were at least 506 schools with such options as of December, 2011, the most recent update provided (National Association for Single Sex Public Education, 2012). Although this study focuses on a Catholic school, single-sex education is clearly no longer a private or Catholic school issue.

**St. Albert’s School: A Catholic School for Boys**

The merits of single-sex education have been regularly emphasized at St. Albert’s School, the all-boys Catholic secondary school at which I have taught for the last eleven years. At the time of this study, the school was at a crossroads; like many other private schools in the New England area, the economic downturn had affected the institution, and fewer families could afford the $19,950 yearly tuition. In addition, the poor economy and scandals within the Catholic Church had generated nationwide enrollment declines in Catholic education, so the school realized it had to consider structural changes to ensure future sustainability, including becoming coeducational or cinstitutional (building a comparable, but separate, single-sex sister school). In conducting the research to inform their strategic plan, the school sent out surveys to faculty, parents, and alumni. Respondents had strong opinions on whether to become coeducational. One cohort essentially said, “St. Albert’s is such a great school that I wish there were a St. Albert’s

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4 Over the 10-year period from the 2000-2001 school year to the 2010-2011 school year, 21.5% of Catholic schools were closed or consolidated, and student enrollment declined by 22.1% (National Catholic Educational Association, 2011).
for my daughter,” and the other faction noted, “We love St. Albert’s and don’t want you to mess with how you educate our boys.”

But just what it means to educate boys and how schools go about doing so, particularly Catholic schools, is not entirely clear, despite what the popular literature might suggest. Although there are over 460 single-sex, Catholic K-12 schools in the United States, which educate roughly 215,000 students (McDonald & Schultz, 2011), these schools are often ignored in educational research. The research that does exist typically explores Catholic schools on the basis of morality and religion (e.g., Donlevy, 2008; Engebretson, 2009; Willems, Denessen, Hermans, & Vermeer, 2010) or relies on statistical analyses of test scores to measure how Catholic school students perform (e.g., LePore & Warren, 1997; Marsh, 1991). In most cases, single-sex schools were not the impetus for the research but rather a variable by which to disaggregate data, so the existing studies shed little light on what actually happens in these environments, and a paucity amount of the literature on single-sex institutions actually considers how these schools address sex and gender, despite a student’s sex being a requisite admissions criterion. When studying gender, Catholic institutions, particularly all-boys, single-sex schools like St. Albert’s, put gender issues in sharp relief; developed by religious men for the purpose of educating boys, the schools are historically patriarchal with structures and curricula that typically serve those in power, as has been documented elsewhere (Crowley, 2006).

As an English teacher at St. Albert’s, I was uniquely positioned to investigate
some of these issues with my students. In a call to arms in a special *English Journal*
issue on gender, St. Pierre (1999) discussed the role English teachers play:

> Trained as we are to study culture through literature and language, we should be able to identify sexism, racism, classism, and homophobia. Gender discrimination still exists; gender oppression still exists, so there is still much work to be done. And, as always, English teachers are positioned to be powerful agents in the continuing struggle for social justice. (p. 33)

Because reading, writing and rich discussion provided the foundation for the courses I taught, my English classroom offered me a strategic research site to explore issues of gender, culture, and single-sex schooling with my students. As a branch of the humanities, English Language Arts is a subject particularly suited for curricular modifications that encourage not only gender balance but also discussion about and interrogation of the construction of gender. As Greene (1993c) notes,

> Language arts…are in large measure for enabling persons to make sense of their experience, to order it, to symbolize it, to attend to it with acts of mind. To work with storytelling, to tap the arts to set imagination free, to break with the “normal” and taken-for-granted, maybe to give persons opportunities to open to one another and to see through other eyes… It is a matter of teachers engaging with active children discovering something about telling stories, articulating perspectives, engaging in terms of *who* and not *what* they are. (pp. 128-129)

Certainly our experience of the world is influenced by our sex, as it is by our age, race, ethnicity, and other factors, so discussions about these influences ought to be part of our discussions about the literature we read. As early as the 1980s, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) recognized the unique position English classes had to encourage gender equity and established guidelines for achieving a gender-balanced literature curriculum (Zeller Carson, 1989). The organization urged secondary schools in
particular to pay attention to reform, noting that “the white male hero remains the staple fare in most of our courses over ninety percent of the time… [and] it is time to consider the integration of literature by and about women as a central concern” (Zeller Carson, 1989, p. 30). I argue that the inclusion of work by and about women is even more important in an all-boys school with a predominantly male faculty.

NCTE’s issued stance, which was last edited on its website in 2008, resulted in some increased attention to gender issues in the English classroom, as evidenced by research published in the 1990s. Teachers and university researchers focused on how to shape discussion about gender using classroom texts (Alvermann & Commeyras, 1994; Alvermann, Commeyras, Young, Randall, & Hinson, 1997), while others investigated how to expand reading lists (Greenbaum, 1994; Hunter et al., 1993; Pace, 1992; Poster, 1997) and what assignments might yield more awareness of gender bias (McIntyre, 1995; Mitchell, 1996). In 1999, the NCTE-produced English Journal even published a themed issue called “Genderizing the Curriculum,” which highlighted ideas for bringing gender to the forefront of classroom consciousness, from starting new courses on gender or women’s literature (Croker, 1999; Slack, 1999) to choosing certain provocative works (Perrin, 1999; Ricker-Wilson, 1999) and paying attention to and interrupting coed classroom dynamics (O'Donnell-Allen & Smagorinsky, 1999; Ruggieri, 2001; Styslinger, 1999).

A shift in the conversation occurred when multiculturalism became a primary focus of education in the 1990s, and “the new task was to identify and describe cultural
As a result, since the new millennium, those working in the field of English education seem to have followed the rest of the country’s lead in curtailing discussions of gender in the classroom and embracing discussions of diversity in a broader sense. *English Journal* serves as evidence of this shift; aside from a special issue on “Sexuality Identity and Gender Variance” in 2009, which focused specifically on lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer (LGBTQ) matters, as of 2012, only three articles explicitly concerned with gender equity have appeared in the publication since the 1999 themed issue (Bruce, Brown, McCracken, & Bell-Nolan, 2008; Kraver, 2007; St. Jarre, 2008). In a national survey of literacy educators at the twentieth century’s end, Commeyras (1999) found that even though over 95% of respondents believed that gender differences were influenced more by socio-cultural factors than by biological and physiological determinants, only 54% were “interested” or “very interested” in learning about gender issues in literacy education. These results reveal a paradox because accepting that gender differences are socially constructed, and therefore not fixed, suggests that gendered literacy practices could also be changed in a way that might benefit the classroom, yet almost half of the educators were not concerned with how gender issues play out in their field. Unfortunately, as St. Pierre (1999) explained:

> We certainly haven’t “fixed” gender discrimination in our society, nor have we fixed it in the English curriculum or our teaching practices… Cultural structures such as the media, the family, and religious organizations teach children how to “do gender” before they ever come to school; and it is very difficult for individual teachers to disrupt a patriarchy so deeply entrenched. (p. 33)
Still, we must try. Ten years after St. Pierre’s observation, Sadker, Sadker & Zittleman (2009) argued that despite decades of attention to gender issues, gender equity is still a pressing concern; in fact, sexism has become “more puzzling and more virulent than ever” (D. Sadker et al., 2009, p. 5), as political and social opposition to gender equity work to undermine feminist efforts, often in obscure ways, and our classrooms remain breeding grounds for stereotypical gender views.

I struggled with “genderizing the curriculum” in my traditional school that seldom strayed from the traditional literary canon. Though the literature curriculum was quite varied at the coed school at which I taught before joining the faculty at St. Albert’s, when I started teaching here, I felt obligated to teach the same books that others in my department were assigning. Without a conscious awareness of it, I became complicit in delivering a curriculum that mirrored the all-male environment of the school. I realized that almost all of the writers on my syllabus were (dead) White men, and the overwhelming majority of the protagonists were male. While one can infuse gender-based discussions into the teaching of any text, I was not helping my students to view the world beyond their own experience by only assigning works that mirrored their own worlds.

Those who argue that our literature curricula should better reflect reality by including more female authors and characters often support this point by citing the girls in the classroom, as Zeller Carson (1989) did in the initial NCTE guidelines:

Curriculum changes need to be made for the sake of intelligent growth in ideas and feelings of women and girls. Feminine readers need to be able to see
themselves in situations true to their own lives as they experience them, to be able to identify with their own gender in many circumstances. (p. 30)

The danger with this argument is that it suggests that if you do not have “feminine readers” in the classroom, it is not necessary to include female authors and characters. In fact, educators at all-male institutions like mine have used that same logic – the need to give students characters and voices they can identify with – to support teaching the traditional (male) canon. While classics such as *Hamlet*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and *The Catcher in the Rye* are worthy of study, Kumashiro (2001) observes, “biases based on class, race, gender, sexuality, and other social markers often play out in the curriculum when the authors and characters of the literature being read consist primarily of middle class or wealthy, White, male, and heterosexual people” (p. 4). When these works are not balanced with authors and characters from other backgrounds and perspectives, “students are not troubling the (mis)knowledge they already have” (Kumashiro, 2001, p. 5).

My reading curriculum did not do my students any favors in acquainting them with other viewpoints, which was my responsibility as a teacher, especially since adolescence is such a critical developmental period when students start forming their own identities. As Keddie and Mills (2007) point out, boys “cannot be held solely accountable for adopting various forms of masculinity that are the product of a broader set of social relations” (p. 5) because they are not adults. Students need help in developing these constructions of themselves and others, and teachers and adults at the school are responsible for assisting them in this development so that the school
community does not “perpetuate an unjust gender order” (Keddie & Mills, 2007, p. 5).

Paying closer attention to how my own classroom challenged and contributed to the
gender order of my school was insightful and valuable to my teaching, and by extension,
my students, fellow colleagues, and society at large.

**Rationale and Research Questions**

Despite interest in single-sex education as an option, single-sex classrooms
remain relatively unstudied, even in Catholic schools, which have a long history of
single-sex education. Practitioner research, or research conducted by teachers studying
their own classrooms or schools, is almost nonexistent in this area; yet, it can generate
and disseminate insider knowledge that directly improves the educational sites from
which it emerges. This research study examined some of the silences in the literature on
how gender construction occurs in single-sex classrooms, specifically in a Catholic, all-
boys secondary school. This study addressed the overarching question: *How was gender
constructed in the context of an English course at an all-boys Catholic secondary school?*
Using the teaching of selected texts in my junior English class as a strategic research site,
I addressed the following subquestions: *As the classroom teacher, what role did I play in
the construction of gender in my classroom via my pedagogy, and interactions and
relationships with my students? How did students construct gender? How did the school
culture shape the ways my students and I constructed gender?*
Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into seven chapters. This first chapter identifies the research problem as it relates to my teaching experiences and the larger context of single-sex education, particularly for boys, and I outline the research questions I sought to answer with this practitioner research study. This chapter argues that single-sex learning environments differ from coeducational ones in how gender is discussed (or silenced) and constructed, if not in other ways, and it highlights the role the English curriculum in such schools can play in bringing discussions about gender to the forefront. I also show how the paucity of research conducted on these topics, especially as they play out in Catholic schools.

The next chapter further details the relative dearth of studies investigating single-sex education and the particular contexts and voices missing from the existing research. In Chapter 2, I lay the theoretical foundation upon which this study built, and I survey the major theories on sex and gender before discussing how these theories apply to adolescent gender development. I then offer a review of the literature on single-sex education, Catholic high schools, and the research that bridges both before presenting the literature on critical feminist pedagogy and how others have applied this lens to their English classrooms. In doing so, I situate this study within the larger context of multiple circles of literature. This chapter makes the argument that teacher and student voices are missing from the work on single-sex education.

Chapter 3 describes the study’s research design. I show how a qualitative,
practitioner inquiry paradigm best addresses the research questions. I employ a case study approach to analyze the culture of the school, my classroom and focal students, as well as my own practice. This chapter details my research setting and participants as well as the data sources and collection methods I utilized.

Based on the analysis I explain in Chapter 3, I illustrate my findings in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. I organize the data presentation via nested case studies, wherein each chapter gets more specific in its focus. In Chapter 4, I introduce St. Albert’s by providing a macro-view of the school culture, particularly when viewed through an insider, gendered lens. The chapter’s main argument is that despite stated goals of inclusivity, acceptance, and caring for the whole person, the culture of St. Albert’s also fostered exclusivity and reinforced stereotypical gender norms that ultimately limited its community members through silence and othering. In so doing, the school created a “brotherhood” that was ostensibly inclusive of the school community and bonded its members, but in actuality, only some of the population felt it applied to them.

Chapter 5 steps from the hallways and locker rooms into my English classroom, the primary site for this research study. I review the traditional English curriculum at St. Albert’s and explore what happens when I introduce strategic texts to discuss gender issues. I argue that despite my attempts to create a more gender-just classroom, my goals for the unit were not fully realized, partly due to the gendered personas my students and I adopted in the homosocial classroom space we shared, personas that often belied our private beliefs. In this chapter, I also zoom in on four focal students to chronicle and
analyze how their experiences of the unit shaped, interrupted, and/or reinforced their constructions of gender.

In Chapter 6, I analyze my own practice and highlight the ways I have navigated and adapted to the school culture since I started teaching at St. Albert’s, often not in ways that aligned with my commitment to gender justice. The argument I make in this final chapter of my arguments is that my persona and practice changed over time and depended on the age and status of the students and faculty in front of me; it was much easier for me to be the teacher I would like to be, one committed to gender justice, when charged with a freshman class as opposed to a junior or senior level course. Still, on the whole, though I hoped to change my students’ constructions of gender, they changed mine as I became gradually more complicit in perpetuating gender constructions that belied my beliefs.

This dissertation closes in Chapter 7 with a review of my arguments and a discussion of their implications for further research, policy and practice. I suggest the relevance of this study as it relates to single-sex education, Catholic education, the field of teacher research, and English curriculum.
Chapter Two
Reading the Landscape: A Review of the Literature

In this chapter, I review and critique the bodies of work that informed this study. I start from the ground up, detailing the important theoretical grounding and key concepts that serve as the foundation for this research. Then, I move to the empirical and conceptual literature on single-sex education, Catholic high schools, critical feminist pedagogy, and English curriculum, highlighting the small body of work that intertwines all of the branches, and from which my study grew.

Theoretical Frameworks

Feminist theory informed this study, as did several compatible theoretical frameworks, including theories of gender, multiple masculinities and femininities, and adolescent gender identity development. Before explaining how these ideas contribute to this study, I want to define the key terms I will use. Glasser and Smith (2008) argue that “theoretical terms that play key roles in researchers’ analyses should be explained clearly enough in print that readers can determine what parts of the examined world are associated with them” (p. 344). The terms “sex” and “gender,” they note, are often used synonymously or without clear differentiation, and vague meanings of the terms prohibit a true understanding of gender and its educational effects. Kilmartin (2010) concurs, “Many people use the terms sex and gender interchangeably, and this linguistic convention can contribute to misunderstandings of the relative contributions of biology and social forces” (p. 15). These researchers are not the first to point out the importance
of untangling these terms. West and Zimmerman (1987), for example, take great care to make distinctions between the terms “sex,” “sex category,” and “gender,” which I explain in more depth when I review the theoretical grounding behind this vocabulary.

Because the proposed study will examine how gender is constructed at a single-sex school, I want to clarify my meaning of these terms. It is worth noting that some of the works I cite throughout this dissertation use the words interchangeably. It is not my desire to clarify other researchers’ vague language, so I keep their original wording, though I acknowledge it as problematic. However, when I use the term “sex,” I am referring to the biological categories of “male” and “female,” and when I use the term “gender,” I am referring to a social, interactional construct typically displayed by the binary categories “masculine” and “feminine.” I will elaborate on these purposely simplistic and potentially problematic definitions as I outline the complex theoretical frameworks to which they are tied.

**Feminist Theory**

Feminist theories of education drove this study and best speak to education’s ability to challenge cultural biases. Due to its focus on the disadvantages of women, feminist theory might seem at odds with a study on boys and masculinity, but I argue that any feminist not interested in how males construct gender has too narrow a focus. In fact, Imms (2000) claims a “binary structure of gender precludes investigating the complex structure of masculinity and has largely ignored problematizing men as part of the solution to gender problems” (p. 158). Among the many definitions of feminism, I adopt
the one offered by bell hooks (2000), who wrote, “feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression…[it] implies that all sexist thinking and action is the problem, whether those who perpetuate it are female or male, child or adult” (p. 1). This definition is useful because it does not focus on women as the lone oppressed group, nor does it paint men as the sole enemy; in fact, hooks’s definition acknowledges that men may be the victims of sexism and that women may be the oppressors. Operating under this definition of feminism prevents one from pitting the sexes against each other and enables one to consider, instead, how the sexes can interact with each other to create a more just order.

Just as there are many definitions of feminism, there is not one all-encompassing feminist theory. It is beyond the scope of this work to review the many interpretations here, so instead I will highlight only those feminist theories that guided this study. Feminist poststructuralist theory considers feminism as a politics directed at changing existing power relations between men and women in society. Poststructuralist theory accounts for “the relation between language, subjectivity, social organization and power” (Weedon, 1987, p. 12). A feminist approach to poststructuralism builds from this general perspective to understand existing gender power relations and to identify mechanisms of inequality. Doing so requires critical feminist research that allows us to “understand social and cultural practices which throw light on how gender and power relations are constituted, reproduced, and contested” (Weedon, 1987, p. vii).
Related to these understandings are two critical theoretical traditions Weiler (1988) describes best: “1) those which emphasize the reproduction of existing social, gender, and class relationships and 2) those which emphasize agency and the production of meaning and class and gender identities through resistance to imposed knowledge and practices” (p. 3). With roots in Marxist theory, reproduction theorists, such as Bourdieu and Passerson (1990) and Giroux (1981), share the view that students’ school experiences help them “to internalize or accept a subjectivity and a class position that leads to the reproduction of existing power relationships and social and economic structures” (Weiler, 1988, p. 6). When looked at through a feminist lens, then, “reproduction theory is concerned with the ways in which schools function to reproduce gender divisions and oppression” and reinforce patriarchal hegemony (Weiler, 2009, p. 219). Chafetz (1990) explains this process another way, arguing that, as social institutions, schools are active agents of engenderment in that they necessarily reinforce social gender definitions.

This view is not sufficient on its own, though, because it fails to consider the resistance or agency of those involved. Production theory helps fill this gap, as it is concerned with the ways in which individuals assert their own experience and contest or resist “the ideological and material forces imposed upon them” (Weiler, 1988, p. 11). Chafetz (1990) writes that even though schools are engendering institutions, at the micro level, individuals in a school, such as administrators, teachers, and students, may accept and participate in, or resist and challenge, this gender system. In this way, schools are not just agents of society, reinforcing (reproducing) social gender definitions, but they are
also *socializing agents* in that they are the primary locations for the development, or the producing, of new ideologies toward gender.

**Theories on Sex and Gender**

“Sex” and “gender” are terms without clear differentiation in part because theories about the two overlap, conflate, and disagree. While several theories on sex and gender exist, I critique three major schools of thought – biological essentialism, sex role theory, and social constructionism – to establish how they have contributed to our knowledge on sex and gender and why a different theoretical view is necessary for guiding research in this area.

**Biological essentialism.** The longest standing theory on sex and gender is biological essentialism, which views two sexes, male and female, and thinks of gender as a direct progression from one’s individual biological sex (Bem, 1993; Glasser & Smith, 2008). According to biological essentialists, then, what makes one “feminine” or “masculine” is determined by biology and remains relatively unchallenged by one’s environment. Gender in this view is “static, trans-historical, cross-cultural, and cross-situational” (Kilmartin, 2010, pp. 20-21). The sentiment “boys will be boys,” frequently invoked in arguments supporting single-sex education, has its grounding in biological essentialism, as it implies that the sexes are somehow predestined to act a certain way, despite any outside influences to the contrary. West and Zimmerman (1987) harken back to this school of thought in their definition of “sex” as “a determination made through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females
or males” (p. 127). Connell (2005) uses the apt metaphor of the “body as machine” (p. 48) to explain the biological theory of gender. In this analogy, the body “operates” or “functions” in certain ways because of biological “programming.” A biological essentialist viewpoint would maintain, for instance, that men are more prone to violence than women because they are “hardwired” to be aggressive.

This theoretical view holds tremendous weight in society, presumably because of its “scientific” basis, as the more recent attention to neuroscience and brain-based research can attest (see, e.g., Gurian, 2005; Lenroot et al., 2007; Sax, 2006). Popularized notions of the studies in this area suggest that the male and female brains are structurally different or develop at different rates, resulting in such phenomena as boys who lag behind in language and girls who trail in math and science. Kilmartin (2010) acknowledges there are differences in genetic and hormonal composition that lead to average male/female differences in height, weight, muscularity, genitalia, and secondary sex characteristics such as breasts and facial hair. There is little dispute that biological sex differences produce these usual physical differences. (pp. 56-57)

However, physical differences do not automatically result in psychological or intellectual differences, as popular media would have us believe.

The biological essentialism theory is subject to criticism. First, as already noted, it presupposes two sexes, male and female. West and Zimmerman (1987) are right to point out that the criteria for sex classification might not agree; for instance, people can have certain genitalia at birth that might not match their chromosomal typing before birth. In fact, as North (2010) acknowledges, the intersex political movement “powerfully
reminds us that nature offers more than two sexes” (p. 376), which Breu (2009) supports with statistics stating that 1 in 100 births differ from standard male or female classification, or “one person in every other or every third or fourth classroom” (p. 103). Even if biological essentialists gave a nod to a third sex, the results of sex difference research would still not provide evidence to support the theory that people’s genders are direct progressions of their biological sex. As Connell (2005) notes, “sex differences, on almost every psychological trait measured, are either non-existent or fairly small…[and] their modest size would hardly register them as important phenomena if we were not already culturally cued to exaggerate them” (p. 21). In a comprehensive review of meta-analyses, Hyde (2005) discovered that 78% of psychological gender differences are in either “the small or close to zero” range (p. 582, 586). Kilmartin (2010) also cites multiple studies that demonstrate “the amount of difference between the sexes was much smaller than the variability within the population of males or the population of females” (p. 40).

Bem (1993) outlines how, by overemphasizing biology and ignoring historical and social context, biological theorists make inequalities between the sexes seem natural and inevitable rather than culturally and historically constructed and modifiable. Pointing to a historical example, Sadker and Sadker (1994) note how biological theories have been invoked to support sex discrimination in education. In the 19th century, Harvard professor Dr. Edward Clarke claimed that prolonged coeducation was physically dangerous to a female’s reproductive health because blood flow would be diverted from
the reproductive organs to the brain. One need only look to history to see more examples of how dangerous the misuse of “science” and psychology can be, from relying on phrenology to predict someone’s personality traits, to using intelligence quotient testing to determine who was worthy of an education (Kliebard, 2004; Ravitch, 2000).

**Sex role theory.** Sex role theory, another way of looking at gender, acknowledges social effects on an individual’s sex and has often been considered the cultural elaboration of biological sex differences. As Kilmartin (2010) explains, historically the term “sex role” has been used interchangeably with “gender role,” which is defined as “a set of expectations for behaving, thinking, and feeling that is based on a person’s biological sex” (p. 26). Brannon (1976) points out that social scientists borrowed the term “role” from the theater, and the basic point is the part one plays need not be the same as the person playing it. In this way, one who is biologically male could enact a female sex role or vice versa. West and Zimmerman’s (1987) definition of the term “sex category” exemplifies a sex role theory approach and helps to explain the distinction between one’s biological sex and the role one plays:

Placement in a **sex category** is achieved through application of the sex criteria, but in everyday life, categorization is established that proclaim one’s membership in one or the other category. In this sense, one’s sex category presumes one’s sex and stands as proxy for it in many situations, but sex and sex category can vary independently; that is, it is possible to claim membership in a sex category even when the sex criteria are lacking. (p. 127)

When women were forbidden from enlisting in the Civil War, female soldiers demonstrated this concept well. Though biologically female, by assuming masculine
names and disguising themselves as men, these women were able to categorize, or “cast” themselves, to use the theatrical terminology, as men.

The concept of sex roles originated in conventional family studies during the 1950s. Theorists posit that in order to meet the functions required by society, “social activities required separate ‘instrumental’ and ‘expressive’ roles” (Pease, 2007, p. 554). This school of thought believes, given their biological differences, men are more suited to fill the instrumental role, such as competing, and women are more adept in the expressive role, such as nurturing. These roles, “supposedly dichotomous, internally consistent, and complementary” (Ferree, 1990, p. 867), are communicated to us from various sources, such as our parents, peer groups, and school environments. In this way, schools are active agents of engenderment, as Chafetz (1990) notes.

The emphasis on this social influence differentiates this theory from biological essentialism and offers the possibility of change. Likewise, Brannon (1976) points out that most roles do not consist of very few exact behaviors but rather have a variety of “acceptable performances” (p. 6). Aside from the option to enact a sex role not aligned with your biological sex, sex role theory holds that because roles are not biologically determined, but rather socially taught, if we offer more varied, positive role models and transmit different expectations, we have the ability to “rewrite the script” of male and female roles to account for variance and fluidity.

Like biological essentialism, though, sex role theory faces sharp critique. Although Brannon (1976) acknowledges the variety of “acceptable performances,”
Lopata and Thorne (1978) argue the terminology “sex roles” is too often used unreflectively and involves too many questionable assumptions to be useful. They contend that role terminology is not applicable to gender because gender “is not a role in the same sense that being a teacher, sister, or friend is” (p. 719). Like race, gender “is deeper, less changeable, and infuses the more specific roles one plays; thus, a female teacher differs from a male teacher in important sociological respects” (Lopata & Thorne, 1978, p. 719), an assertion my experiences at St. Albert’s seem to confirm. Connell (2005) acknowledges the value of “the dramaturgical metaphor of role” (p. 26) in analyzing social situations, but concurs with Lopata and Thorne that the concept ultimately does not adequately apply to gender because sex role theory is linked to the flawed theory of biological essentialism; with this tie, sex role theory is still a dichotomous concept that leaves little room for other intersecting factors like race, age, and culture. As Ferree (1990) succinctly states,

> the concept “sex roles,” rooted in socialization, internalized in individuals, and merely echoed in and exploited by other social institutions, cannot encompass the actual variation in men’s and women’s lives – individually over the life course and structurally in the historical context of race and class. (p. 868)

When applying this theory to boys and schooling, as in this study, “boys are seen as fixed, passive victims of gender socialization. Schools are also seen as places where boys learn to fit into a pre-existing gender role or script that trains them up in aggressiveness or competiveness” (D. Jackson & Salisbury, 1996, p. 107). The major problem with this idea is that, as any teacher who has had to follow a scripted curriculum knows firsthand, students do not always stick to the script. Sex role theory does not address individual
resistance to sex roles, nor does it put any responsibility on the individual for accepting
and enacting a role, as the belief is that social forces influence sex roles rather than
individual free will.

Social constructionist theory. Social constructionists, on the other hand, afford
people greater agency in the development of their genders. Social constructionism
emphasizes the influence of social context on learning and views the environment as a
major force in shaping societal norms (Vygotsky, 1978). When applied to the concept of
gender, social constructionist theory suggests that people actively construct gender (both
their own and others’) through their interactions with their surroundings. In this way,
“people’s practices lead them to construct what qualifies as masculine and feminine”
(Glasser & Smith, 2008). West and Zimmerman’s (1987) definition of “gender” is more
in line with a social constructionist view in that it describes gender as an action that one
does rather than a label that one is: “gender…is the activity of managing situated conduct
in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one’s sex
category. Gender activities emerge from and bolster claims to membership in a sex
category” (p. 127). In this way, gender is more fluid and subject to change over time
rather than a fixed category tightly bound to one’s sex.

Many different sects fall under the umbrella of social constructionism, but the
more predominant ones are materialist and discursive views of gender. Materialist
accounts are directly influenced by materialist feminism, an approach that “combines a
radically anti-essentialist approach to gender and sexuality with a socio-structural
analysis informed by Marxism” (Brickell, 2006, p. 88). As such, this school of thought puts emphasis on power and social structures and views the forms gender and sexuality take as effects of inequality rather than its causes. Discursive accounts focus on how unwritten rules “that normatively constrain male and female behavior are asserted and accepted in language” (Glasser & Smith, 2008, p. 347). Butler (1999) looks at how these rules contribute to a performative theory of gender. She explains: “gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts” (p. 179). Her definition focuses on gender construction as an act that occurs within the larger “scenes” of institutions and culture. As opposed to the “body as machine” metaphor to represent biological essentialism, Connell (2005) uses an art metaphor to contrast social constructionism: social constructionists view “the body as a canvas to be painted, a surface to be imprinted, a landscape to be marked out” (p. 50).

This theory has been productive in moving the conversation about sex and gender away from biological differences, and it offers more optimism for how social institutions such as schools can act in conjunction with students to shape gender rather than merely transmit gendered expectations to them. While sex role theory does not address responsibility or the individual’s role in resisting or accepting gender roles, social constructionists view people as active participants in creating the cultural environments that influence them.
Though social constructionist theory has advanced our thinking on gender, this view ultimately falls short for an important reason: it disembodies gender. As Connell (2005) explains:

Gender is hardly in better case, when it becomes just a subject-position in discourse, the place from which one speaks; when gender is seen as, above all, a performance; or when the rending contradictions within gendered lives become “an instatement of metaphor”…a wholly semiotic or cultural account of gender is no more tenable than a biological reductionist one. The surface on which cultural meanings are inscribed is not featureless, and it does not stay still. (p. 51)

Bodies matter; they cannot be divorced from our practice or experience of gender. The appeal of androgyny, a concept in which biological sex has no implications for a person’s life or interactions with others, was “short lived” for this precise reason (Young, 2005, p. 14).

These theories of gender, summarized in Table 2.1 below, have significant deficiencies, so we need a different way of thinking about it. One might be tempted to take the strengths of biological determinism and social determinism and arrive at a compromise, but as Connell (2005) warns, if both of these views have significant flaws, “it is unlikely that a combination of the two will be right” (p. 52).
### Table 2.1. Theories of Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Belief</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Biological essentialism</strong></td>
<td>Gender is a progression from one’s biological sex (male or female) and remains relatively fixed.</td>
<td>Accounts for genetic and hormonal differences between sexes that produce typical physical differences.</td>
<td>Presupposes only two sexes; divorces gender from history, culture, and other factors; does not acknowledge greater variability within sexes than between them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex/gender roles</strong></td>
<td>Gender is a set of expectations based on a person’s biological sex but one’s biology does not bound one to a certain role.</td>
<td>Accounts for social influences, allows for change, and acknowledges that there are a variety of ways to enact one’s role.</td>
<td>Stems from biological essentialism in its foundation of two sexes; does not consider agency; simplifies gender by putting it on par with other roles that are more superficial and changeable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social constructionism</strong></td>
<td>Gender is actively constructed through people’s interactions and, as such, is more about actions that one does rather than a label that one is.</td>
<td>Acknowledges gender as fluid and subject to change, and gives people agency in gender’s construction.</td>
<td>Disembodies gender by treating individuals as blank canvases influenced by social forces rather than as bodies that are both agents and objects of gender practice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**A body-reflexive, multi-structured approach.** Connell (2005), an Australian sociologist, argues for a theoretical position where “bodies are seen as sharing in social agency, in generating and shaping courses of social construct” (p. 60). She elaborates: “With bodies both objects and agents of practice, and the practice itself forming the
structures within which bodies are appropriated and defined, we face a pattern beyond the
formulae of current social theory” (p. 61), one coined “body-reflexive practice.”

A nuanced, useful theory of gender also needs to attend to gender as multiple
structures rather than just one. Connell (1987) identified three pertinent structures that a
thorough analysis of gender ought to consider: labor relations, power relations, and
emotional relations. In a later revision of this notion, Connell (2000) added a fourth
structure: symbolism, or communication relations. Although separate structures, Figure
2.1 below illustrates these aspects as overlapping configurations to acknowledge the
symbiotic relationships they have. For instance, the division of labor creates a hierarchy
of power, which influences how people communicate and present themselves and the
emotional attachments they have to each other.

Studied within the context of a school, Connell (2000) asserts these structures as
composing the school’s “gender regime.” Labor relations concern the gender divisions of
labor in the form of task allocations and the economic consequences of these divisions.
This structure would involve the work specializations among teachers, such as higher
concentrations of women in elementary schools or in language and literature departments.
Labor relations also concern the gendered choice of electives at the secondary school
level, such as which students take ceramics versus which students take computer
programming, and how these electives are communicated and marketed to students.
Figure 2.1. Multiple structures of gender

Power relations in the U.S. involve patriarchy, or the overall subordination of women and dominance of men, despite resistance and several movements to upset this order. Power relations in schooling include “supervision and authority among teachers; and patterns of dominance, harassment, and control over resources among pupils” (Connell, 2000, p. 153). This area would concern who handles student discipline and how, who evaluates teachers and under what criteria, and which students dominate classroom discussions, for instance.
Emotional relations, which Connell (2000) refers to as “cathexis,” are important because “desire is so often seen as natural that is it commonly excluded from social theory” (p. 25). This structure of gender concentrates on the practices that shape and realize desire and people’s emotional attachments to each other. How schools address sexuality falls within the realm of this structure and seems particularly relevant to the all-male, secondary context in which this study took place.

The final structure, communications relations, is perhaps the most applicable one to this work. Connell (2000) asserts “the symbolic structures called into play in communication – grammatical and syntactic rules, visual and sound vocabularies etc. – are important sites of gender practice” (p. 26). In addition to the gender subordination that can occur through linguistic practices, Connell groups the symbolic presentation of gender through such aspects as dress, makeup, and gestures as part of this communications relations structure. In this way, the language a school uses to communicate its values, from its mission statement to its motto, and the uniforms or dress codes it imposes all fall within the communication relations structure. This structure is also concerned with how knowledge is gendered by defining certain curriculum areas as masculine (science and math) and others as feminine (languages and art).

The theoretical framework I have outlined so far has a feminist foundation in that it contends that sexist thinking and action is problematic, regardless of whom it is directed toward or who perpetuates it. In order to identify and correct mechanisms of inequality and work toward a more equitable society, a poststructural feminist theoretical
lens focuses on understanding existing gender power relations and how these are reproduced or challenged. Gender is understood as multiple structures of social, interactional relations that people navigate through body-reflexive practices. When we turn our gaze toward education, this theoretical grounding allows us to view schools as both agents of society that reinforce societal gender norms and as socializing agents that can contribute to producing new gender ideologies. We can understand how schools serve these roles by studying their gender regime, or how labor, power, emotional and communication relations interact in a given classroom or larger institution. However, since this study took place at an all-boys high school and concerned gender issues in the education of male students in a classroom with a female teacher, an understanding of masculinity and femininity is essential to this complex theoretical framework, as is an awareness of adolescent gender development.

**Multiple Masculinities**

Given the theory of gender outlined above, masculinity should not be thought of as an object or even a behavioral norm, but rather as “simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality, and culture” (Connell, 2005, p. 71). This definition is easier to conceptualize by returning to the multiple structures of gender relations in Figure 2.1. At any given point in time, people are participating in one or more of these structures, which is the “place” that Connell refers to.
In a definition similar to Connell’s, Kimmel (1994) views “masculinity as a constantly changing collection of meanings that we construct through our relationships with ourselves, with each other, and with our world” (p. 120). He asserts that we understand masculinity “by setting our definitions in opposition to a set of ‘others’ – racial minorities, sexual minorities, and, above all, women” (p. 120), a concept I return to in Chapter 4. Masculinity, then, refers to male bodies but is not solely determined by male biology, hence the discussions of female masculinity (see, e.g., Halberstam, 1998; Noble, 2004; Schippers, 2007), which I elaborate on later.

As with the thinking on sex and gender, there are multiple theories of masculinity. Brannon (1976), for instance, claims masculinity has four essential themes:

1. No Sissy Stuff: The stigma of all stereotypical feminine characteristics and qualities, including openness and vulnerability.
2. The Big Wheel: Success, status, and the need to be looked up to.
4. Give ’Em Hell!: The aura of aggression, violence, and daring. (p. 12)

Brannon does not suggest that any one man embodies all of these themes and projects these images at all times, but the expectation, both of greater society and of men themselves, is that they should. Decades later, Brannon’s themes certainly still pervade our cultural notions of masculinity, but we need a more fluid and adaptable theory. Connell’s (2005) concept of multiple masculinities is a helpful starting point and has served as a strong framework in much of the research on men and masculinity in the last two decades. Criticized for being a trait conception of gender and for not properly emphasizing the agency of women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Schippers, 2007),
Connell’s model does need revision to fit within the theoretical framework I have established thus far, but first, I will highlight the key concepts. The theory rests on what Connell (2005) calls four “main patterns of masculinity in the current Western gender order” (p. 77): hegemony, subordination, complicity, and marginalization.

**Hegemony.** As mentioned earlier, Connell (2005) defines hegemonic masculinity as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (p. 76). Hegemonic masculinity is the form of masculinity that is most culturally exalted, as Brannon’s (1976) themes might be considered, but is not typically the form of masculinity most frequently enacted; in fact, only a minority of men might represent it. It is important to note that, like the overarching concept of gender I discussed earlier, hegemonic masculinity is not a fixed, transhistorical model. It can be contested, challenged, and changed by different orders, particularly at the local level, such as a school community. I have seen the beginnings of this change at St. Albert’s with the recent succession of headmasters. The previous head drove a Corvette sporting a vanity plate with the school’s name, and had a firm handshake and a booming voice. The new head of school, who served as St. Albert’s principal for seven years before assuming this role, drives an SUV that fits his four young kids, is more likely to greet you with conversation rather than his outstretched hand, and is softer spoken. The students certainly have a different model of masculinity at the helm now, and since the headmaster contributes to setting the tone of the school,
this change in leadership may result in a change in hegemonic masculinity at our school, which I discuss in Chapter 7.

**Subordination.** If hegemony is the dominant form of masculinity, there must inevitably be a subordinate form. Connell’s (2005) discussion of subordination centers primarily on homosexuality, noting the variety of practices in European and American society that subordinate gay men to straight men. In the United States, we have seen this subordination with such controversial decisions as whether to allow openly gay men (and women) to serve in the military and whether to legalize gay marriage (as opposed to civil unions). However, gays are not the only subordinated group. Heterosexual males are often subordinated if they are perceived to lack hypermasculine qualities, and this subordination frequently occurs through gendered language, specifically homophobic slurs (see, e.g. J. Klein, 2012; Swearer, Turner, Givens, & Pollack, 2008). Such language is commonplace in American high schools where the word “gay” is often a substitute for anything perceived as “uncool.” According to Klein (2012), one study found that the average high school student hears 25 anti-gay slurs per day, a finding that sadly did not surprise me given how frequently I have heard such remarks as a teacher at St. Albert’s.

**Complicity.** Complicit masculinity refers to the large number of men who do not enact hegemonic masculinity but nevertheless gain what Connell (2005) calls “the patriarchal dividend” (p. 79). This dividend is what men gain from patriarchy “in terms of honor, prestige, and the right to command” (p. 82), in addition to a material dividend. To offer a basic example, students enact complicit masculinity when they chuckle or
remain silent when a sexist joke is uttered in class, knowing, consciously or not, that they risk subordination if they speak out against it. However, one must be careful not to consider complicit masculinity as merely the “slacker version” of hegemonic masculinity. As Connell (2005) notes, many men “who draw the patriarchal dividend also respect their wives and mothers, are never violent towards women, do their accustomed share of the housework, bring home the family wage, and can easily convince themselves that feminists must be bra-burning extremists” (pp. 79-80).

Marginalization. The final component to Connell’s multiple masculinities model acknowledges the interplay of gender with other structures such as race and class. According to Connell (2005), “marginalization is always relative to the authorization of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group” (pp. 80-81). To illustrate this point, Connell highlights black professional athletes who may exemplify aspects of hegemonic masculinity, but their individual fame and wealth does not trickle down and give authority to black men generally.

It should be clear from the descriptions that these masculinities are fluid; one can and probably will move between them often as well as occupy more than one at a time. For example, the black professional athlete mentioned above would indeed inhabit marginalized masculinity, but his athletic prowess also occupies hegemonic masculinity. Likewise, the wealthy, handsome, high-powered executive who turns a blind eye to the sexual harassment of a female coworker and is also a homosexual would be occupying aspects of hegemonic, complicit, and subordinate masculinities.
Incorporating Femininity into Gender Hegemony

Though helpful in furthering the notion of gender as fluid, embodied, and related to power, Connell (2005) admits this multiple masculinities model is sparse and intentionally abstract. In fact, in response to criticisms of the model, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) explain, “as a theoretical formulation finds application in other settings and by other hands, the concept must mutate” (p. 854). The concept must indeed mutate when applying these ideas to an all-boys secondary classroom with a female teacher, especially to stay faithful to the theoretical viewpoints I already outlined. Earlier, I argued that feminists focused only on women’s issues are shortsighted. By focusing solely on masculinities, Connell’s model commits a similar error. Connell (1987) acknowledges there are multiple femininities:

All forms of femininity in this society are constructed in the context of the overall subordination of women to men…One form is defined around compliance with this subordination and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men. I will call this “emphasized femininity.” Others are defined centrally by strategies of resistance or forms of non-compliance. Others again are defined by complex strategic combinations of compliance, resistance, and co-operation. (p. 187; pp. 184-185).

However, she does not explain how these femininities interact with the multiple masculinities nor explicate the facets of multiple femininities in as much detail. As Mimi Schippers (2007) argues, we are still in need of a theoretical framework that 1) offers a conceptualization that does not reduce masculinities to the behavior of boys and men or femininity to the behavior of girls and women, 2) provides a definition of femininity that situates it, along with masculinity, in gender hegemony and allows for multiple configurations, and 3) is empirically useful for identifying how masculinity and femininity ensure men’s dominance over women as a group… (p. 89)
Because anyone interested in gender equality needs to have a comprehensive view of how the sexes can interact with each other to create a more just order, bringing femininities into the model is imperative.

Schippers (2007) suggests defining hegemonic femininity and redefining Connell’s version of hegemonic masculinity serves this effort of rebuilding a more comprehensive model. In her conceptualization, hegemonic femininity “consists of the characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (p. 94). Therefore, hegemonic masculinity is the flip side of the coin in that it consists of the qualities defined as manly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to femininity. In our society, the manly characteristics that differentiate men from women and legitimate dominance over women are physical strength, power and authority, and the desire for “the feminine object,” as Schippers (2007) puts it (p. 94), characteristics similar to what Connell labeled as hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic femininity, then, is the embodiment of physical weakness, submissiveness and compliance, and the desire for men and to be desired by men, similar to what Connell deemed “emphasized femininity.”

According to Schippers and Connell, while any person can embody the characteristics of either, hegemonic femininity must remain exclusively in the hands of women and hegemonic masculinity must remain exclusive to men because the hegemonic
relationship is lost otherwise. For example, when a man embodies the characteristics of hegemonic femininity (he is physically weak, submissive, and both desires, and wants to be desired by, men), he “disrupts the assumed naturalized, complementary desire between men and women, and...dislodge[s] physical strength and authority from the social position ‘man’” (Schippers, 2007, p. 96). Likewise, when women demonstrate hegemonic masculinity by asserting authority, being physically violent, and/or desiring other women, they “contradict or deviate from practices defined as feminine, threaten men’s exclusive possession of hegemonic masculine characteristics, and most importantly, constitute a refusal to embody the relationship between masculinity and femininity demanded by gender hegemony” (Schippers, 2007, p. 95; emphasis in original). In either case, such behavior is met with “swift and severe social sanctions” (Schippers, 2007, p. 95), often verbal but also physical; for example, authoritative women are referred to as “bitches,” and effeminate men are referred to as “fags,” and both groups are often ostracized in social settings, often most severely by those in their shared gender category.

It is worth noting that there are feminine and masculine traits that do not legitimize a hierarchical and complementary relationship between men and women, and therefore can be enacted by either men or women freely, without penalty. For example, in most cultures, men can be nurturing and care for their children, central features of femininity, without losing status. Similarly, women can be athletic and competitive, central features of masculinity, and still be considered feminine. As Schippers (2007)
notes, “what actual characteristics and practices are idealized as masculine and feminine is ultimately an empirical question and will vary by context, group, and society. The importance of context cannot be overstated here” (p. 98). Schippers suggests exploring the following questions in localized settings, such as my English classroom: “1) What characteristics or practices are understood as manly in the setting? 2) What characteristics or practices are womanly? 3) Of those practices and characteristics, which situate femininity as complementary and inferior to masculinity?” (p. 100). In addition, she argues that empirical explorations of these topics should also investigate what characteristics or practices are disruptive to gender hegemony. These questions helped me understand how my adolescent students and I constructed gender in our classroom.

**Male Adolescent Gender Development**

Though adolescence is often considered to be a time of great change in physical, social, and cognitive areas, surprisingly we know much less about gender development during this period than we do in childhood or adulthood. What studies on sex differences between teenagers have shown is consistent with the literature on sex and gender in general: the differences are often quite small, and there is more variability within the sexes than between them (Perry & Pauletti, 2011). McHale, Crouter and Whiteman (2003) reviewed the research and theory on the family’s role in gender development during childhood and adolescence and found “that family experiences may have a more important impact on gender development than has previously been believed” (p. 125); however, they acknowledged the scope of the work in this area was limited. In a later
comprehensive review of the literature on gender development in adolescence, Galambos, Berenbaum, and McHale (2009) also uncovered a lack of longitudinal data needed to hypothesize patterns or sources of change in gender development from childhood to adolescence. We still know relatively little about how teenagers form concepts of gender categories, though schools are regarded as salient influences on development. As Galambos et al. (2009) presented, “teacher efficacy, teacher-student relationships, organizational structures, and the timing and nature of school transitions are among the important characteristics of school environments thought to be relevant for gender development” (p. 343), though, again, classrooms are not frequent research sites for adolescent gender development.

Perry and Pauletti’s (2011) more recent review highlighted some key findings relevant to the work in this study. First, boys’ gender identity is stronger than girls’. As a group, they view themselves as more similar to their same-sex peers and place more pressure on themselves for gender conformity. Their sexual identities are also more rigid than their female counterparts, whose self-labeling as homosexual or bisexual tends to be more fluid. Male teens are more often the perpetrators of peer sexual harassment, including using homophobic slurs. Within all-male groups, there is more competition and conflict than all-girl groups or mixed-sex groupings. Likewise, “the more time male youths spend interacting with male (vs. female) peers, the more gender typed their personality traits and interests become” (Perry & Pauletti, 2011, p. 69). Not surprisingly, Perry and Pauletti (2011) also located a study that showed that the more boys speak
disparagingly about females with male peers, the more they aggress toward female relationship partners later. Though studies were not conducted in single-sex school environments, these findings raise a critical eye to the role all-boys high schools play in students’ gender development.

The gender intensification hypothesis. One plausible explanation for these disheartening findings, and for any sex differences that might exist in adolescence in general, is the Gender-Intensification Hypothesis put forth by Hill and Lynch (1983). This hypothesis states that with the onset of puberty, boys and girls are faced with an intensification of gender-related expectations and become more stereotypically differentiated in their gender identities as a result. As Priess, Lindberg, and Hyde (2009) note, this idea “is intuitively appealing because it so readily explains [the] systematic changes” that occur during adolescence (p. 1531). However, though Hill and Lynch developed the hypothesis by drawing on the existing literature at the time, few empirical studies have actually tested this hypothesis since then, and those that have found mixed results (see, e.g., Galambos, Almeida, & Petersen, 1990; Priess et al., 2009). To my knowledge, this hypothesis has not been investigated in single-sex classrooms.

Precarious manhood. Another useful concept from the theoretical literature on is that of “precarious manhood.” Drawing on multiple studies of males from teenagers to adults across many disciplines, Vandello and Bosson (2013) claim manhood is “precarious.” They identify three principles to establish this concept:

First, manhood is widely viewed as an elusive, achieved status, or one that must be earned (in contrast to womanhood, which is an ascribed, or assigned, status).
Second, once achieved, manhood status is tenuous and impermanent; that is, it can be lost or taken away. Third, manhood is confirmed primarily by others and thus requires public demonstrations of proof. (p. 101)

The researchers point out that “precarious manhood” particularly applies to Western traditions because our cultures “no longer facilitate young men’s entry into manhood by ushering them, *en masse*, through formal rites of passage” (p. 102); therefore, men are left on their own to prove their status. Vandello and Bosson point out that to assert their status, many men engage in rough sports and activities and public displays of homophobia.

Thinking of manhood as precarious invites three important implications, according to Vandello and Bosson (2013), who considered their work with college-aged men in addition to their research synthesis. First, men will experience more anxiety than women do in gender threatening situations. The researchers identify job loss as a gender threat, but applied to adolescence, getting cut from a sports team could be considered a gender threat. Second, men will take whatever measures necessary to prove or reassert their manhood, even, or especially, if such actions are risky or aggressive. The researchers cite financial risk-taking among adult men, but physical fights demonstrate this implication in the world of teenaged boys. Finally, men will avoid circumstances that threaten their manhood status, particularly by eschewing anything regarded feminine.

**Mature masculinity.** The vision of masculinity that we ought to strive for, according to researchers Jolliff and Horne (1999) is that of “mature masculinity.” Adapting Steinberg’s idea of the “whole male,” Jolliff and Horne argue that one achieves
mature masculinity when he has “become fully developed in all human traits without
selection on the basis of traditional gender roles” by synthesizing the traits typically
considered masculine and feminine “according to what is true for him as a fully
functioning human being” (p. 17). In this way, the male “has denied neither his
masculine self nor his feminine self. He has become fully himself in spite of any social
imperatives to the contrary” (p. 17). In order to develop a mature masculinity, Jolliff and
Horne (1999) state that boys and adolescents need to be taught what the concept is, and
they “need nurturance and guidance by both males and females; one without the other is
insufficient” (p. 4; emphasis in original).

Jolliff and Horne (1999) contend a boy has to master a number of tasks to learn
this concept: understand and develop friendships; learn his place in the family; interact
with women in his world and understand the many messages the women send about how
to be a man; monitor and regulate his emotional expressions; and establish a set of values
to direct his life that balance his individualism with his role in the family. These tasks
resonate with what Connell (2000) argues should be the goals of educational work with
boys: knowledge of gender in one’s own society and others; good, healthy, human
relationships; and social justice, which includes gender justice. These goals, along with
the larger concept of mature masculinity, guided my work with my students.

Feminist Pedagogy

In adhering to feminist theory, this study utilized feminist pedagogy, which
“refers to a particular philosophy of and set of practices for classroom-based teaching that
is informed by feminist theory and grounded in principles of feminism” (Crabtree, Sapp, & Licona, 2009, p. 1). Unfortunately, many discussions of feminist pedagogy fall into the trap of focusing solely on women. In reality, feminist pedagogy does not just involve teaching about women and feminist perspectives; it is inherently critical in that it interrupts hegemonic educational practices that reinforce and reproduce “an oppressively gendered, classed, racialized, and androcentric social order” (Crabtree, Sapp, & Licona, 2009, p. 1). Teachers of feminist pedagogy do this by critically thinking not just about what is taught but also how it is taught. They are therefore concerned with the relationships between teachers, students, education, and society at large, and they develop teaching strategies “that resist reinscribing dominant cultural notions about gender, race, sexuality, and class, and deliberately problematize essentialist terms and constructs that have historically marginalized individuals and groups that have functioned to oppress a full range of human experience” (p. 5). Given this focus, feminist pedagogy works in conjunction with the theories on sex and gender and multiple masculinities and femininities that guided this work. Following are more specific examples of how these ideas are compatible in practice via previous empirical and conceptual work.

**Literature Review**

In addition to the theoretical work that serves as the foundation for this dissertation, I draw on several bodies of research: the history and literature on single-sex education; research on Catholic secondary schools; literature on critical, feminist pedagogy, and research on the English Language Arts curriculum as a vehicle for
achieving equity and exploring identity. Of particular note are the studies within these larger categories that focus on gender, and some gender-focused research that cuts across all four categories. In this review, I include articles from peer-reviewed journals as well as relevant dissertations, some of which have been published. As Arms (2007) notes in her review of the literature on single-sex education, a large body of research focuses on classrooms in Australia and the United Kingdom, where the political context differs greatly from that of the U.S. and where public, single-sex education has a much longer history. Though we should not assume that the results of these studies apply to American classrooms, I include some of the international work here that is particularly relevant to gender issues as they play out in the classroom, especially since the research on single-sex U.S. classrooms is comparatively sparse.

It is worth noting that every literature synthesis I reviewed ultimately concluded that the weight of the evidence did not indicate that segregating students by sex leads to a more equitable education for either sex (Arms, 2007; Campbell & Wahl, 2002; Haag, 2002; Lee, 2002; Leonard, 2006; Marks, 2002; Salomone, 2006). In fact, Jackson (2010) noted,

Because single-sex schooling ignores the complexity of sex, gender, and sexuality, it sets up a “separate but equal” system that is anything but. Discounting the ways in which gender is negotiated, constructed, and performed, and the variability of anatomical sex, current arguments for single-sex schooling reify the false binaries of sex and gender, rely on assumptions of heteronormativity and, in turn, negate the existence of multiple sexes, genders, and sexual orientations. (p. 227)
As I note, the existing U.S. research on single-sex education consistently relies on crude, binary indicators of sex and stereotypical notions of gender, and the research shows that even educational practices meant to interrupt these constructions often backfire.

**Single-Sex Education**

Several early U.S. primary and secondary schools only educated boys, operating under the assumption that educating girls was unnecessary. Even when teaching girls gained more acceptance, many U.S. schools continued as sex-segregated institutions to give students the gender-specific preparation they needed for their future “positions.” Even when coeducation became the norm, educating students under the same roof did not mean they received the same education. While many classes were coeducational, students still received instruction along different gender-specific tracks, with boys taking shop classes while girls went to home economics, for example (Arms, 2007). This separate education continued until the Civil Rights Movement and the Women’s Movement of the 1960s and ’70s. Just as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the Civil Rights Act (1964) challenged the institutional segregation of racial and ethnic minorities, Title IX of the Education Amendments (1972) prompted reform for gender equality by allowing sex-segregation only in specific instances, such as for contact sports, sex education classes, and remedial or affirmative activities that would counteract sex discrimination. Title IX regulations helped women gain access to programs that had previously been denied them, but, as Salomone (2006) points out, “it soon became clear
that coeducation itself was not the cure-all for deeply institutionalized attitudes and practices” (p. 781).

As Salomone (2006) explains, by the 1980s, officials were growing concerned about the widening achievement gaps between white students and those of color and between males and females, which renewed interest in single-sex schooling as a potential way to address these disparities:

- For girls, initial attention was directed at raising achievement in math and science. For racial minority students, particularly boys, the early focus was on developing positive attitudes and a sense of academic identification that would overcome educational and social deprivation. (p. 781)

At about this time, U.S. researchers started focusing on the benefits of single-sex schooling. A few seminal works have shaped the conversation about this topic. One prominent international piece that predates the ones I mention here was Dale’s three-volume set (1969, 1971, 1974), which ultimately recommended coeducation because of its ability to act as a realistic microcosm of society. Perhaps the earliest American work to consider the different environments coed and single-sex institutions provided, Coleman’s review (1961) suggested that a same-sex atmosphere was more conducive to education because it minimized the adolescent subculture that competes for attention with academic achievement. Following his analysis, the first handbook on the topic was published (S. S. Klein, 1985), which looked at the issue of sex equity in education through multiple perspectives, including philosophy, psychology, and economics. The dominant discipline on the subject, however, has clearly been sociological, and it was from this standpoint that the American Association of University Women (1992) and the
Sadkers’ book (1994) operated when they both claimed that teachers devoted more time and attention to their male students, as noted in Chapter 1.

**Student attitudes.** The largest body of research focusing on sex-segregated education looks at its effects on students’ attitudes and beliefs. The majority of these studies ask a form of the question, “What are the effects of single-sex education on students’ perceptions?” Only three of the eleven works in this section, two of which come from the same author, approach the issue from a more interpretive perspective, asking, “How do we know single-gender classrooms influence students’ opinions?” This research can be divided further into four subsections: subject-specific attitudes, career choices, stereotypical beliefs, and peer relations.

**Subject-specific attitudes.** These studies reflect the time period in which they were written. As noted earlier, in the early 1990s, the AAUW’s (1992) alarming report on how girls take a backseat to boys in the classroom was immediately followed by the Sadkers’ book (1994) on the same subject. Understandably, when examining single-sex education, researchers working during this era primarily looked at how such arrangements would empower female students, particularly in math and science, subjects in which they were falling behind.

Three of the four works in this area found that girls reaped benefits from a same-sex classroom (Steinback & Gwizdala, 1995; Streitmatter, 1997, 1998). Qualitative and interpretive in nature, Streitmatter’s research looked at girls’ academic risk-taking in an all-female middle school math class (1997), which she linked to the fifth stage in
Erikson’s psychosocial development theory that encourages risk-taking, and she studied how girls in a single-sex high school physics course felt about their experience (1998). Streitmatter (1998) justified her ethnographic approach by explaining how her research question drove her design:

Because young women’s attitudes about participation in single-sex classes in otherwise coeducational U.S. schools is largely unexplored, the main purpose was to identify important variables and themes about this topic. This approach allows the research to consider the subjects’ voices more fully. (p. 370)

The results of her interviews overwhelmingly support a single-sex environment for girls. With her mathematics study, Streitmatter (1997) found that the girls were more inclined to ask and answer questions in class. All but one of the 24 girls chose to continue with the all-girls class the following year, and all 14 of the students that Streitmatter interviewed raved about the single-sex makeup of the class. In researching the physics class, Streitmatter (1998) discovered similar results. Of the 12 students from the all-girls class randomly selected for interviews, all said they recommended the class to other girls and agreed “that they were more able to get their work done better and on time without the presence of boys” (p. 372). In this study, Streitmatter also observed a coed physics class taught by the same teacher in the same room and noticed striking differences, namely that the boys dominated the class and that the teacher’s interaction “with the boys tended to be directly about their work” (p. 373) instead of the joking and teasing he engaged in with the girls.

While they offer a glimpse as to the girls’ experiences in these environments, Streitmatter’s studies have problems, most of which she openly admits. The girls who
benefited from the all-girls math class, for example, were hand-selected by the principal, who chose girls with the highest test scores and grades in order “to promote the success of the class” (Streitmatter, 1997, p. 18). While the non-voluntary assignment to the class eradicates a self-selection bias, the researcher noted that the girls-only class coupled with the fact that the students were hand picked for participation could have created a Hawthorne effect. Also, Streitmatter did not observe these students in coed classes to truly know whether they were more inclined to participate in the single-sex course; she relied on self-reports from the students.

Also relying on self-reporting from their subjects, Steinback and Gwizdala (1995) found similar benefits when they investigated students’ attitudes toward math by comparing questionnaires from students in a Catholic, all-girls math class with those from female students in two private, mixed-gender math courses. The females in the girls-only class “exhibited a significantly higher degree of self-confidence than those from the mixed-sex schools” (p. 36). The researchers added a second dimension to their study by also studying whether the merger of the all-female Catholic school with a similar all-male Catholic school would affect the girls’ attitudes. Using the same questionnaire design, Steinback and Gwizdala concluded that the inclusion of males did not change the females’ beliefs about math or their ability to do it, suggesting that a coed math class did not have a deleterious effect, at least after only one year of implementation.

Note that while this study could have been grouped with the others in the section focusing on Catholic school environments I cover later, I chose to consider it here due to its subject-specific concentration.
In another article in this subsection, Wood and Brown (1997) extended the earlier studies by investigating the result of students’ attitudes, namely whether girls will be more inclined to take advanced math and science classes as a result of placement in a single-sex College Algebra I class in 9th grade. The researchers utilized an experimental design by comparing the course selection data from 77 female students who occupied the College Algebra I all-girls section with 52 girls who were placed in the coed version of the course. Unlike Streitmatter’s study (1997), the girls in this study were randomly placed in the treatment or control groups via the school’s computerized scheduling program, and Wood and Brown (1997) examined the data from a larger sample of four graduating classes, both of which contribute to the study’s strengths. The researchers found no significant difference in course selection between the intervention and non-intervention groups, showing that the girls’ positive feelings did not translate to their increased enrollment in advanced math and science classes; however, the study did reveal a higher increase in the mean difference in Maine Educational Assessment scores between grades 8 and 11 for the intervention group, suggesting the girls benefited from the class academically rather than attitudinally. Wood and Brown called for more research, preferably designs utilizing mixed-methods with random selection of students for both the intervention and nonintervention groups, a tall order given that, even with the recent loosening of Title IX restrictions, students legally cannot be placed in single-gender classes unless they elect them.
Although all of the researchers in this section are female and each examined the effects of participation in an all-girls math or science class, none of them explicitly stated how their backgrounds or beliefs might have influenced their work. However, in the case of Steinback and Gwizdala (1995), their allegiance with the girls is inherent in their choice to examine how the merger of two single-sex schools affected the females rather than the males. Although this study found that the merger did not adversely influence students, readers must wonder if Steinback and Gwizdala would have arrived at a different answer had they framed their research question to include how this arrangement impacted boys.

Career choices. This subsection of student attitudes on career choices consists of five studies that complement each other in their focus (Billger, 2009; James & Richards, 2003; Karpiak, Buchanan, Hosey, & Smith, 2007; J. S. Thompson, 2003; Watson et al., 2002). Watson et al. (2002) used two samples to answer their two research questions; I focus on the second part of their study, which seeks to determine if a single-sex environment will wield a positive impact on the career aspirations of girls throughout the achievement spectrum (compared to those from a coed background). Employing what they identified as a three-decade old “paradigm that distinguishes between individuals’ ideal career choice—what they would choose to do without the constraints levied by reality—and their realistic career choice—what they would actually envision themselves doing” (p. 326), the researchers administered questionnaires on career aspirations and teacher ratings of the participants’ overall academic achievement and learned that girls
from single-sex schools had heightened career aspirations both in the “ideal” and “realistic” distinctions. Furthermore, unlike their coed female and male peers, girls from a sex-segregated school did not show a drop in their career aspiration scores prior to 12th grade, a phenomenon the researchers did not attempt to explain.

In their discussion of their results, Watson et al. (2002) noted that their approach left many questions best answered by a more interpretive stance. Observing that, “the ideal-real difference score was a construct that didn’t produce meaningful differences” (pp. 332-33), the researchers suspected a different study design, using an interview format to probe the reasoning behind the responses given, would allow for a more accurate measure of aspiration, which would in turn lead to a more accurate measure of difference between ideal and real aspirations. (p. 333)

James and Richards (2003) and Thompson (2003) built on Watson et al.’s (2002) work with middle and high school students by investigating the college majors graduates from single-sex schools actually declared, hinting at the careers they might pursue. Both studies found that students in sex-segregated schools were more likely to choose majors that went against stereotype. James and Richards (2003) discovered that men from all-boys schools reported college majors in the humanities at a significantly greater rate than their coed counterparts and exhibited more interest in English, reading, and history than those men who attended coed schools, and Thompson (2003) learned that graduates of all-girls schools were more likely to major in sex-integrated fields compared to highly female fields. Both of these studies relied on quantitative data. James and Richards (2003) used data from questionnaires given to male alumni from independent schools,
and Thompson (2003) got her data from the High School & Beyond study, using only the information from the female participants.\(^6\)

Using archival data at a coed Catholic university, Karpiak et al. (2007) produced similar findings to James and Richards (2003) but extended their investigation beyond declaration of major and looked at whether these majors were sustained throughout college to graduation. Men from single-sex schools were more likely to both declare and graduate in gender-neutral majors than those from coeducational schools, but while women from single-sex schools were more likely to declare gender-neutral majors, by graduation, they were not different from their coeducated peers, meaning they eventually changed majors and graduated in a different field. In addition, Karpiak and colleagues (2007) examined whether there was a correspondence between egalitarian attitudes, single-sex education, and choice of major. While levels of egalitarianism were higher within students with non-traditional majors, men from single-sex schools were less likely to hold egalitarian attitudes about gender roles, and women from single-sex schools did not differ in egalitarianism from their coed graduate peers. Karpiak et al. (2007) noted, “Taken together, our results raise questions about the potential of single-sex high schools to reduce gender-stratification in professions” (p. 282).

Billger (2009) arrived at a similar conclusion after conducting her research. Controlling for the selection bias that can often skew the results of studies on private,

\(^6\) Note that while this study could have been grouped with the others focusing on Catholic school environments that I address later, and particularly with other studies that also drew from the High School & Beyond database, I chose to consider it here due to its specific concentration on college majors, which mirrored James and Richards’s (2003) study.
single-sex education, Billger (2009) studied only private school graduates and used other techniques to address selection bias. Relying on data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS), Billger found that compared to graduates from private coed schools, girls’ school alumnae are no more likely to pursue college degrees, and both genders are less likely to meet their own educational expectations. However, single-sex schooling may support gender equity, as single-sex schools yield the least segregated college major choices. (p. 393)

Billger concluded that, “taken together, these results do not provide a ringing endorsement of single-sex education” (p. 402), but in some cases, male African-American students experienced unique advantages, such as larger salary gains.

Stereotypical beliefs. Although any study that examines the influence of a classroom’s gender composition on its students’ attitudes concerns itself to some degree with stereotypes, the three empirical works in this subcategory made this concern their explicit focus. As with most of the studies that fall under the student attitudes camp, two of the reports both centered on girls; Signorella, Frieze and Hershey (1996) analyzed longitudinal data from a K-12 private school in transition from all-girls to coed, and Craig (1999-2000) took a qualitative, case study approach to determine how a two-week summer technology institute for girls changed their stereotypical views of math, science and technology. Both found that the girls’ attitudes changed, but Signorella et al. (1996) attributed the transformation to maturity and the passage of time rather than a single-sex classroom, as there was no consistent tendency for girls in sex-segregated classrooms to display less gender stereotyping. Though she did not have a control group with which to
compare her results, Craig determined that the all-girls setting did positively impact its participants, citing that prior to the workshop, 48 of the 52 students felt that science, math, and computers were “male-oriented” areas, but after the single-sex institute, only half the students indicated such attitudes.

Both of these studies also address the teachers’ roles in shaping these beliefs, which few studies in this category do, but because the teachers were not the main focus of either study, I include these works here rather than in the later “teachers, policy, and pedagogy” section. Signorella et al. (1996) mentioned how aware the administrators and teachers at their school site were of previous research on gender equity, particularly those studies that suggest negative effects on girls when placed in classes with boys. They noted “the school worked hard to counteract any possible negative consequences after they decided to change from an all-girl to an integrated environment, including providing their teachers with training in how to prevent such effects” (p. 606), suggesting that an awareness of how gender issues manifest themselves in the classroom can help teachers create more gender-equitable environments, regardless of the sex composition of the institute. The teachers in Craig’s (1999-2000) study also received training on gender differences, but, to the researcher’s surprise, “most did not seem to utilize the information gained from sessions” (p. 361). Most likely these discrepancies are due to the different settings; in Signorella et al.’s (1996) research, the school was 104 years old and consisted of full-time faculty and an administration that clearly made gender differences training a major focus. In contrast, Craig’s site was a summer workshop that included teachers and
students from multiple schools in different systems, and the training was only a week long, interspersed with other sessions on technology and achievement in math and science.

The third study in this category is particularly relevant to my research because it compared boys from an elite single-sex preparatory school to boys from a comparable coeducational school to investigate the effects their education had on their masculine identities and their attitudes about women and gay men (Addelston, 1996). Relying on survey data from senior students and alumni from the last twenty years, Addelston used correlational analyses to test the equal status contact theory. Often applied to explore racial integration, in this study, Addelston employed it to study gender. Equal status contact theory states “that the more contact two conflicting groups have, that is of an equal nature, the less likely they are to be antagonistic to each other” (Addelston, 1996, iv). Her study predated the research Karpiak et al. (2007) conducted, but Addelston’s results were similar. Her findings supported the equal status contact premise, as she found that, unlike the men from the coeducational institution, the “men from the single sex school view their version of masculinity in more traditional ways. Women are seen as a distraction from scholarly pursuits, and they feel more comfortable as men in male-only groups” (Addelston, 1996, p. 64). In addition, the single-sex cohort had more negative attitudes about gay men. Addelston also discovered that the survey results from the seniors were consistent with those of the schools’ alumni, which she suggests shows
that the attitudes boys have when they graduate do not easily change into adulthood. In
the discussion of the results, Addelston argues,

The next generation of research on men and masculinities must take up how
institutions produce certain types of masculinities...Looking at these young men
as they pass through high school might enable us to learn the particulars of how
and when the “hidden curriculum” takes hold and is embodied and/or resisted,
and whether or not the message is taken in differently as an effect of how much
time has been spent in the institution. (pp. 70-71)

My teacher research study aimed to do just this by looking at the particulars of both St.
Albert’s hidden curriculum and a curriculum designed to challenge hegemonic
masculinity.

Peer relations. Interestingly, I found only one study that examined the
relationship between a same-sex classroom composition and children’s peer relations
(Barton & Cohen, 2004). Perhaps not surprisingly, the setting for this research was an
elementary school, one of the few studies in this review to focus on younger children.
Operating under various theories of friendship formation and peer aggression and
victimization, Barton and Cohen attempted to fill a void in the research by designing a
study that investigated the effects of single-sex schooling on children’s social
development. Using eight different tests of social functioning, the researchers
determined that the impact of change from mixed-sex to single-sex classes was greatest
on friendships and social behaviors, with boys developing more mutual friendships and
girls developing more aggressive behavior in the first year of the project that subsided in
the second. Because this study is the only one to focus on how a sex-segregated
composition affected students’ interactions with each other, more research should be conducted before we formulate definitive conclusions.

Non-dominant students. Given that one of the impetuses for revisiting same-sex schooling was concern over the achievement gap between whites and other racial groups, the relatively small number of studies included in this category is surprising. However, as Riordan (1994) notes, while the idea of establishing single-sex schools to address non-dominant students’ low achievement might be well-intentioned, it sparks a contentious debate, with various Civil Rights groups taking pains to block the creation of such institutions, “arguing that segregation in any form could lead to forced resegregation” (Herr & Arms, 2004, p. 531). Indeed, the sites for these research studies were exceptions rather than the norm. These studies vary in epistemology, with three approaching the topic from a positivist stance to identify what effects, if any, sex-segregated programs have on non-dominant students, and the three most recent works operating from an interpretive stance utilizing an ethnographic design to explore the nuances of how the single-sex arrangement works in the classroom. I will address these studies by the epistemological perspective they adopt, which also results in a chronological approach.

Riordan (1994) grounded his work in eight theoretical rationales that support same-sex environments for non-dominant populations and women and evaluated his results by applying the concept of social capital, “the capacity of social institutions to ‘invest’ a wealth of attention, advice, support, interest, values, comfort, and care in children or students” (p. 198). Under this framework, he used quantitative data from the
minority sample from HS&B survey to conclude, “for each year of attendance at a single-sex school, African-American and Hispanic students obtain significantly greater gains in their test scores, leadership behaviors, and environmental control” (p. 202).

Singh, Vaught and Mitchell (1998) used Riordan’s (1994) and Coleman’s (1961) work to guide their research, which focused on 5th grade African-American students. Employing a quasi-experimental research design to compare achievement data from single-sex and coed classrooms, they learned that, for girls, the same-sex grouping resulted in higher grades and higher achievement on standardized tests; for boys, the sex-segregated classes yielded higher grades, but lower test scores. Given the subjectivity of grades and the teachers’ knowledge of this research study, Singh et al.’s (1998) data could reflect a Pygmalion effect, although the researchers failed to consider this possibility.

Clark (2001) contributed to this body of research by finding that students in single-sex math classes achieved higher gains as measured by standardized tests. His study also speaks to the limitations of the math and science studies mentioned earlier in this synthesis (Steinback & Gwizdala, 1995; Streitmatter, 1997, 1998). Basing his research at a private middle school in Rhode Island that stated its mission was to “challenge minority and low-income students to succeed” (p. 148), Clark was able to test how single-sex math classes affected both girls and boys and found it an advantageous situation for both sexes. Also, because the students were sex-segregated for 6th and 7th

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7 Note that while this study could have been grouped with the others focusing on Catholic school environments, I chose to consider it here due to its specific concentration on non-dominant populations.
8 While this study could have been included with the other subject-specific ones, I chose to address it here because the majority of the research subjects are non-dominant students and because it did not investigate the students’ attitudes.
grade math but re-entered a coeducational class for 8th grade, Clark could determine whether the advantages gained in the same-sex setting carried over to the coed classroom by comparing data to other years when this arrangement was not in effect; he found that those who had been in same-sex courses did perform better than those who never had the experience. In discussing his results, Clark called for more research to investigate the question of why single-sex settings work so well, which the studies in the “teachers, policy, and pedagogy” section attempt to address, but first we need to look at how these situations play out in practice.

In their ethnographic studies of sex-segregated environments, Baker (2002) Hubbard and Datnow (2005), and Herr and Naiditch (2011) all highlighted the importance of the teacher-student relationship, and Hubbard and Datnow went so far as to suggest that this factor might carry more importance than a single-sex program in improving students’ educational experiences and achievement. To arrive at her conclusion, Baker conducted a study at the request of two female middle school teachers who initiated single-sex classrooms to help spark minority girls’ interest and academic success in science and math, grounding their decision to do so in the theory that, in the absence of boys, girls would have more leadership opportunities and would develop better attitudes toward the subjects. Implementing all-girls classes required the teachers to create an all-boys class as well, not for reasons of equity but because of scheduling. Throughout the 3-year experiment, the teachers struggled with the boys’ classes, often

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9 This study could easily have been considered in the “student attitudes” or “teachers, policy, and pedagogy” sections, but because the teachers who initiated the study did so explicitly to address the needs of non-dominant students, I chose to include it in this category.
speaking of “dressing for combat” (p. 4) when having to teach them. The teachers admitted their preference for teaching the girls and sometimes even told the all-girls classes that they were the favorites; in contrast, the teachers said they were afraid of the boys and were harsh with them both in tone of voice and body language. While Baker’s results support a single-sex setting for girls because of the students’ higher achievement (as judged by the grades they received) and self-reported preference for the class, readers must consider how the results would have been different had the two teachers adapted their pedagogy to address the problems they perceived with the boys-only class.

In contrast, the teachers in Hubbard and Datnow’s (2005) research “believed it was their responsibility to provide emotional and moral guidance, as well as academic support” (p. 127) to all of the non-dominant students in their classrooms, which were part of 12 “single-gender” public academies opened in California in 1997. The researchers provided several examples from their ethnographic field notes that illustrated the teachers’ willingness to talk about their own lives, exchanges with the students that they judge particularly effective when the teacher mirrors the student’s gender, race, and/or socioeconomic status, confirming the results of other studies (Dee, 2004, 2007). Their observations of the same-sex schools prompted Hubbard and Datnow to conclude that the academies’ success in engaging non-dominant students was not solely attributable to the single-sex designation, but rather that distinction in conjunction with “financial support from the state, and the presence of caring, proactive teachers” (p. 128).
Herr and Naiditch’s (2011) ethnographic, year-long study documented the implementation of a single-sex humanities class that was successful in large part because of another such caring, proactive teacher. Following a public, urban middle school in California that had been reconstituted into single-sex academies, Herr and Naiditch noted that “while many of the all-male classrooms floundered” (p. 363), the pedagogical practices of one teacher, Mr. Yardley, enabled his students to create an environment that “would lead them to succeed collectively” (p. 362). Using interviews with Mr. Yardley and his students, along with classroom observations, the researchers identified Mr. Yardley’s high expectations of student conduct, his desire to learn about the boys’ personal lives, and the openness of the classroom dialogue, all of which stood in stark contrast to the other all-male classes at the school that seemed to be characterized by chaos. While the researchers effectively showed that Mr. Yardley’s classroom “minimized distractions,” one of the goals of the school’s reconstitution, they did not comment on whether this single-sex arrangement succeeded in its second goal, raising standardized test scores and improving student achievement. Though they did surmise that the boys’ experience “makes it more likely that as these boys prepare for futures beyond the classroom, they will continue to use individual labor for the collective benefit and will couple autonomy with responsibility” (p. 363), they did not offer sufficient justification for such an optimistic outlook.

These studies address an important aspect of the single-sex schooling debate and also remind us that gender equity is not the only issue at stake. Still, although this body
of research draws its conclusions from sites serving non-dominant populations, the racial and ethnic composition of the school population was often the only place in these reports where this distinction was mentioned. Singh et al. (1998) stated that previous studies on the value of sex-segregated environments “have not taken race/ethnicity into account” (p. 165), but even studies investigating the effects of these programs on non-dominant students seem not to give consideration to race or ethnicity beyond designating a variable for it. This problem may lie more with the sites studied than with the researchers themselves, though. As Baker (2002) noted in the discussion of her research, despite her study’s teachers’ obvious attempts “to learn Spanish to communicate with their students, they did not think about equity issues beyond gender” (p. 21). Clearly, when implementing a program to address a particular issue like non-dominant students’ low achievement, proper training about that topic should occur as well, as the professional development sessions on gender differences did in Signorella et al.’s (1996) study. Future research in this area of the single-sex versus coed debate ought to be concerned with the explicit measures beyond sex-segregation that schools put into practice to address non-dominant populations.

**Teachers, policy, and pedagogy.** I located six studies about either teachers’ experiences with single-sex classes or the more general classroom ecology of a sex-segregated environment. Admittedly, many of the studies discussed in this category overlap in focus with the other designations I have identified, but, presented together, these works allow us to look at how policy impacts, and often undermines, single-sex
program implementation and how teachers can create gender-equitable learning environments. As implied by the title of this category, this research can be divided further into two subsections: teachers and policy, and teachers and pedagogy.

**Teachers and policy.** The only study to rely solely on quantitative data, the research conducted by Lee, Loeb and Marks (1995) assessed what effect sex has on teachers’ perceptions of their control over policies that affect their school environments. Drawing from survey data collected by the National Study for Gender Grouping in Independent Secondary Schools, Lee et al. (1995) challenged the stereotypical theory that women choose “not to compete for positions of power because they are more concerned with home and family responsibilities” (p. 285). If this were true, the researchers argued, then we would see no difference across school type in women’s perception of the power of their voices in contributing to school policies. Instead, Lee et al. (1995) found that in coeducational and boys’ schools, male teachers perceived greater influence over school policies than their female colleagues, but the trend was reversed in girls’ schools, with women faculty experiencing greater influence than men, “suggesting that organizational factors rather than personal choice enforce the male dominance in control over school policy” (p. 285). Connell’s structures of gender that I mentioned earlier can help explain these results, particularly the labor relations and power structures. Though they were unable to investigate whether the gender of the school head was a contributing factor, in the researchers’ stratified random samples of schools, women heads of school were essentially absent except in girls’ schools, so it is reasonable to assume that there was a
larger percentage of women in administration at the all-girls schools in this study. As Lee et al. (1995) point out, “women working for women in girls’ schools, as well as teaching only girls, could be the explanatory factors here” (p. 286).

The implementation of single-sex education that California’s public system made in select districts in 1997 serves as an example of an effect of a larger reform movement, in this case, school choice. As Datnow, Hubbard and Conchas (2001) explain, in a climate of dissatisfaction with public education, California Governor Pete Wilson enacted legislation to open 12 “single-gender” public academies in 6 districts as a way to provide public school students more choice. The academies provided fertile ground for researchers. In this research study, Datnow et al. (2001) drew on qualitative data collected during site observations and over 200 interviews with teachers, principals, parents and students to answer their research question of how policy makers’ and educators’ beliefs and goals influenced the design and enactment of single-gender public schools. The researchers discovered that, while set by the state, the policy was mediated at the school level when implemented by local educators in each community; therefore, “educators’ ideologies about gender and their responses to students’ gender-specific needs shaped the curriculum and pedagogy” (p. 196). Unfortunately, these ideologies were pre-existing ones, as planned staff development sessions to raise gender awareness seldom actually occurred, resulting in “an absence of opportunity for discussion about what it meant to be teaching boys and girls in single gender classrooms” (p. 199). This
lack of a unified vision suggests that some educators were working toward gender equity while others promoted stereotypical attitudes.

Herr and Arms (2004) corroborated Datnow et al.’s (2001) results in their findings from Single Sex Academy, a separate single-sex initiative in California that opened in 1999, 2 years after Governor Wilson’s schools. After embarking on a 2-year ethnographic study consisting of teacher, student, and administration interviews in addition to observations, surveys, and document analysis, the researchers found that single-sex pedagogy received little attention, as the success of the school “became equated with improving students’ performance on the Stanford 9 tests” (p. 528). Echoing Datnow et al.’s (2001) conclusions, Herr and Arms (2004) noted, “Without ongoing staff development or conversations regarding gender, there was nothing to interrupt teachers’ gendered assumptions and ideologies” (p. 544). While the school did successfully raise test scores during the first two years of the program, “both teachers and students noticed and lamented the shift in the classroom environment when test preparation took precedence over other teaching styles” (p. 543). Here, the accountability movement, and the high-stakes testing that comes with it, was at odds with other reforms (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). These results are disheartening but not surprising given other research on factors that undermine reform (see, e.g., Kennedy, 2005).

**Teachers and pedagogy.** While their work predated Datnow et al. (2001) and Herr and Arms (2004) by about a decade, the research Lee, Marks and Byrd (1994) conducted on sexism in the classroom suggests that not much had changed in 10 years.
Citing the previously discussed social production theory, which posits “that students and teachers are active agents of accommodation, resistance, or alternative choices” (p. 93), the researchers maintain that sexism in the classroom is not inevitable and that it is from this location that change should spring; indeed, the other studies in this subsection show that such change is possible (D. L. Anderson, 2005; Rodrick & Tracy, 2001).

Unfortunately, the results from Lee et al.’s classroom observations and quantitative data drawn from the same database as Lee’s earlier work (Lee et al., 1995) showed that teachers initiate most of the events of sexism in the classroom, with the most severe forms found in boys’ schools propagated by male teachers. The researchers concurred with Datnow et al. (2001) and Herr and Arms (2004) that schools should address gender issues “by giving them regular attention at faculty or departmental meetings, as well as during homeroom discussions, as occasions arise in the classroom, at assemblies, during chapel, or at other appropriate times” (p. 116); in short, attention to gender equity needs to be part of everyday school life.

The other two studies in this area are examples of pedagogies that engender equity. In her case study of SummerMath, an intensive four-week program for high school girls, Anderson (2005) used standpoint theory, a materialist feminist theory, as a framework for her study. Applying this theory to mathematics education “values women’s and girls’ voices in the classroom, considers their mathematical and nonmathematical experiences in the learning and teaching process, and acknowledges the unique perspective that they bring to the learning environment” (p. 175). As in Craig’s
(1999-2000) study, the teachers in this program participated in weeklong training, but theirs seemed wholly focused on applying the feminist standpoint theory to their teaching. Like other previously mentioned studies suggested (Datnow et al., 2001; Herr & Arms, 2004; Hubbard & Datnow, 2005; Lee et al., 1994; Signorella et al., 1996), the SummerMath teachers explored feminist principles of teaching and learning mathematics, discussed equity issues relevant to teaching, and examined their own beliefs about these critical issues. Not surprisingly, Anderson (2005) noticed teachers drawing on their professional development experiences in her classroom observations, and most of the students she selected for interviews using a criterion-based sampling approach agreed that their classroom experiences were a source of empowerment.  

The most promising study in this area was the participatory action research Rodrick and Tracy (2001) conducted. Designing her project in collaboration with a university professor and an eye toward elements of a gender-sensitive classroom environment, Rodrick clearly outlined her background, researcher bias, methods and findings, the only study in this review to do so (while some identified aspects of this, most omitted their disclosure of bias). As with many of the other researchers already discussed, Rodrick’s focus was toward encouraging the girls in her science classrooms, but during the course of her research, she “came to realize that boys are shortchanged in different ways within the context of school” (p. 30). She found that students in coed classes mediated each other’s gender-specific behaviors, whereas pupils in the sex-  

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Note that this study, too, could fit in the student attitudes section, but I chose to include it here because the articles focuses more heavily on the progressive pedagogy the program employed.
segregated classes indulged them. Though the researchers did not acknowledge the Gender Intensification Hypothesis in their article, these observations would certainly support the theory I mentioned above that there is greater pressure to conform to culturally accepted gender norms when in single-sex environments. To address this discrepancy, Rodrick audited Tracy’s graduate course on “Gender Socialization in Schools” and adjusted her teaching to “promote more androgynous learners” (p. 31), defined as those who extend their range of acceptable classroom behaviors beyond their traditionally prescribed gender roles. A key step in this process was Rodrick’s sharing her preliminary research results with her students, which caused students to adjust their behaviors. Her commitment to promoting gender equity in her classrooms via reflective practice will hopefully be echoed by other practitioners in future action research studies.

More than any of the other sections discussed thus far in the literature review, this small body of work shows how important teachers are in shaping their students’ classroom experience, for better or worse, yet the small number of these studies also indicates how seldom teachers’ perspectives are included in the larger research conversation on gender in the U.S. (and other topics, for that matter). In a later section on English curriculum, I will discuss particularly relevant studies on gender in single-sex classrooms that seriously consider, if not completely focus on, the classroom teacher, but it is important to note that I had to look beyond the U.S. to find such work.
Catholic High Schools

The paucity of empirical research on Catholic secondary schools is surprising given its long educational history. Still, the research that does exist shows these are indeed unique institutions. As Lucilo (2009) aptly summarizes,

Catholic schools emphasize a core academic curriculum with a modest range of electives, support teachers’ expectations for academic mastery, hold students accountable for their own academic performance, support students before and after school, and emphasize development of the whole student concerned with the kind of persons students become as well as what they know (Bryk & Holland, 1984; Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993). Students are viewed as whole persons to be educated rather than as distinct intellectual capacities to be advanced or particular problems to be solved. Teachers often describe their role as ministry in helping to shape young adults. Research also supported that Catholic school educators view their role with students as more facilitative, having less dictates in the classroom than public school teachers, and tending to encourage more of an atmosphere of openness, cooperation, and student self-monitoring (Shimabukuro, 2001). (p. 60)

My teaching experience at St. Albert’s is certainly consistent with her description, as are the general results of the 17 studies that make up this section of the literature review. These studies vary widely in focus and data collection methods, but they paint a somewhat promising picture of student and teacher engagement and, perhaps as a result, student achievement.

Student attitudes. The four studies in this subset offer differing results, but they suggest that students who attend Catholic schools have higher academic expectations and a more favorable view of their teachers. Using the Educational Longitudinal Survey of 2002 to investigate the variation in factors that contribute to Asian, Black, Hispanic, and White students’ educational expectations, Lowman and Elliott (2010) found that “students in Catholic schools had significantly higher educational expectations regardless
of student race or ethnicity than students in public schools” (p. 102). In addition, although school characteristics were least predictive of Black student expectations, “only enrollment in a Catholic or private school increased Black students’ expectations” (p. 104).\(^{11}\)

In a four-year, longitudinal investigation into the ways students in two urban, Catholic high schools conceptualized and spoke about learning, achievement, and motivation, Bempechat, Bouley, Piergross, and Wenk (2008) found that students endorse a strong sense of personal responsibility in their own learning, adhere to adaptive beliefs about difficulty and challenge in learning, and perceive their schools as caring environments in which teachers take a deep interest in both their academic and psychosocial well-being. (p. 167)

The researchers were particularly struck by how the 20 students in their study regarded their teachers as “relentless in their pursuit of high-quality work from their pupils” (p. 175), noting that “teachers take a deep interest in both their [students'] academic and psychosocial well-being” (p. 171). This observation is similar to the earlier studies, particularly in the “non-dominant students” and “teachers, policy, and pedagogy” sections, that noted the teacher-student relationship as a key component to student outcomes.

The portrayal of the Catholic school experience was less favorable in Hallinan’s (2008) estimated cross-sectional and longitudinal models of teachers’ influences on students’ feelings about school. Using data from 6\(^{th}\)-, 8\(^{th}\)- and 10\(^{th}\)-grade students in

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\(^{11}\) Like previous studies that could be considered in multiple sections, I chose to include this research here instead of in the “non-dominant students” section due to its focus on Catholic schools. It is also interesting to note that in my search for articles, I came across this one only by using “Catholic” as a search term; it did not appear in my various other searches.
public and Catholic schools in Chicago, she found that, on average, the “statistics showed the public school students liked school more than did the Catholic school students” (p. 277). However, students are “more likely to be attached to school when they perceive that their teachers care about them, try to be fair, and praise them” (p. 278). Unfortunately, Hallinan did not offer any insight into why the public school students’ opinions varied from their Catholic school counterparts or whether Catholic school students felt more strongly about their teachers than the public school students did.

The final study in this section, which looked at the role service-learning teachers play (Stewart, 2008), also offered mixed results. Using data from interviews with students and administrators at an urban Catholic high school to compare the qualifications and roles of the service-learning teachers, and their intended roles as described by administrators to the perceived roles as voiced by students, Stewart revealed “a mismatch between the program’s intended purposes and how associated practices manifest in the classroom emerges from the findings” (p. 71). Although teachers fulfilled several of their intended roles as described by administrators, they did not meet expectations in relation to the learning element of the program, according to student recollections. Stewart surmised the disconnect occurred because the teachers in question were novice educators who did not have sufficient pedagogical training, and/or they did not receive regular guidance from administrators, but another possible explanation is student recollections might not have been reliable, as Stewart did not indicate how much time passed before students were surveyed.
Teacher development. The two studies that looked at teachers’ views of their professional and personal growth centered on professional development and prayer. Lucilo (2009) surveyed the Diocese of Toledo, Ohio regarding the professional development needs, perceptions, and plans of high school teachers and administrators. The main purpose of this study was to determine differences and similarities between the two groups’ views on professional development (PD) for secondary educators in diocesan Catholic high schools. Perhaps not surprising to those in schools, teachers characterized effective professional development “as ongoing and included training, practice, and feedback as well as opportunities for reflection and feedback” (p. 66). They felt school-wide in-service opportunities were most desirable, “followed by an integrated approach, and a diocesan-wide approach” (p. 67). Ideally, the PD sessions would be half-day or all-day sessions and would cover “specific content material and instructional strategies” (p. 69) over topics like classroom management. School and diocesan administrators’ responses to the survey concurred with the teachers’ view for the most part, but ranked instructional strategies more important than content material. “The results support the idea that teachers and school administrators want professional development to impact the classroom and student learning directly” whereas “diocesan administrators want to help teachers develop a broader view of what and why things are useful in the classroom” (p. 72).

Teachers at Catholic schools also value prayer to support the school’s Catholic identity. In Mayotte’s (2010) web-based survey to gather national data about 702
elementary and secondary faculty members’ communal prayer experiences, she discovered that 76.9% of respondents believe that faculty prayer strengthens the school’s Catholic identity and 70.9% believe common prayer incarnates the school’s mission statement. The survey showed that while the majority of faculty desired regular prayer and prayer experiences took place readily, the frequency and form varied greatly. Mayotte noticed stark differences between elementary and secondary teachers; 78% of elementary school faculty engaged in prayer daily, but 49% of secondary faculty reported praying less than weekly. These results seem to reflect the more strenuous time constraints secondary schools face compared to elementary schools rather than a lack of desire; Mayotte claimed respondents lamented that secondary schools do not schedule regular time for prayer.

**Parent involvement.** Two studies about Catholic high schools took a closer look at the parental network involved. Morgan and Todd (2009) analyzed the 2002 and 2004 administrations of the Education Longitudinal Study (ELS) to reexamine Coleman’s (1961) claim that “intergenerational social closure promotes student achievement” (as cited in Morgan & Todd, 2009, p. 267). They found that within Catholic schools, those “that are characterized by dense parental networks have substantially higher average student achievement. This association can be reduced but not eliminated by conditioning on available measures of student network structure and standard measures of family background” (p. 267). In short, Morgan and Todd (2009) discovered “that parental closure in its form observed in the ELS data is mostly ineffective in the residential
communities that surround public schools but may be effective in the functional communities that surround Catholic schools” (p. 279).

Parental involvement is attributed to the success of Catholic education among a subgroup of elementary and secondary students in Los Angeles in Litton, Martin, Higareda and Mendoza’s (2010) study. Using mixed methods, Litton et al. revealed that students from non-dominant populations and low-income communities enrolled in Catholic schools are graduating from secondary schools at a significantly higher rate than their public school peers.\(^\text{12}\) The researchers attributed these high graduation rates in part to the good relationship between parents, teachers, and administrators. The 1,808 parents surveyed as part of the research placed trust and faith in the schools “that is hard to replicate in public school settings” (p. 360). Though the researchers did not interrogate why parents felt this way, these results are not surprising given that the parents chose a Catholic education for their children.

**Drug use.** Another study in this section investigated the connection between Catholic school attendance and drug use. Building on previous research that found that “students enrolled in Catholic schools generally use less cigarettes and marijuana compared to students enrolled in public schools” (p. 26), Steinman, Ferketich, and Sahr (2008) conducted multinomial logistic regression analyses of 33,007 Columbus, Ohio high school students and found “marked differences in alcohol, marijuana, and cigarette use among youths who never, occasionally, or regularly participated in [religious

\(^{12}\) Again, I discuss this study here instead of with the others on “non-dominant students” due to its Catholic focus.
activity]” (p. 22). For all three substances, the researchers found no interaction effects with Catholic school attendance, but students who participated in religious activity weekly had less substance use. These results suggest that Catholic school attendance alone does not mitigate drug use, but perhaps the religious programs and activities offered at these schools do encourage students who take advantage of them to abstain from these substances.

**Single-sex, Catholic high schools.** As noted earlier, researchers primarily turned their attention to sex-segregated schools in the 1980s. Because public education was legally prevented from offering single-sex classes, scholars were forced to examine private schools, and, given their long history of gender-segregation, Catholic schools became popular research sites. The first six studies out of the eight in this section focus on high schools; rely solely on quantitative data; use the same source or a variation of it for collecting their data; ground their work in either Coleman’s (1961) theory of adolescent subculture or Dale’s (1969; 1971; 1974) theory of the coeducational school as a microcosm of society; and attempt to answer whether single-sex Catholic school students have more favorable outcomes than their coed equivalents. In addition, most authors include each other in this conversation.

Riordan (1985) began what would become a contentious debate with his study on whether those in a single-sex Catholic environment would academically outperform those in Catholic coed classes. Operating under the theory set forth in Coleman’s research (1961) that states our society has an “adolescent subculture in which the importance of
physical attractiveness and heterosexual popularity takes primacy over academic achievement, especially within the school itself” (Riordan, 1985, p. 521), Riordan essentially set out to argue that two types of Catholic schools should be distinguished in the research: coed and single-sex. Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of 1972, Riordan showed that the differences between Catholic coed students and their public (coed) peers were slim, but that sex-segregated Catholic environments were, on average, nearly twice as effective as Catholic coed institutions. Lee and Bryk (1986) confirmed these results in their study using data from the High School & Beyond (HS&B) study, sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics, the same agency to support both the National Longitudinal Study of 1972 that Riordan used and the Longitudinal Study of 1988 from which LePore and Warren (1997) later drew their data.

Because four of the first six studies in this subsection use the same database, an explanation of the HS&B study is in order. According to its sponsoring agency, the survey included about 30,000 sophomores and 28,000 seniors in 1980 from a national representative sample of 1,105 schools, and both cohorts were surveyed every two years through 1986. Additionally, the sophomore group was surveyed again in 1992 (http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/hsb/). Given the large national sample this study included, it is easy to see why so many researchers used its data, particularly those studying Catholic schools since these institutions were deliberately oversampled.
Marsh (1989a) drew from the HS&B data in his replication of Lee and Bryk’s (1986) study. Subscribing to Dale’s (1969; 1971; 1974) theory favoring coeducational learning environments, Marsh took issue with Lee and Bryk’s interpretations and what he felt was the inappropriate use of one-tailed tests of statistical significance. He reanalyzed Lee and Bryk’s data with the inclusion of postsecondary outcomes from HS&B that were not available when the two researchers conducted their analysis, and he concluded that the differences between single-sex and coed Catholic high school students could not be legitimately interpreted as effects of school type because they reflected preexisting differences. Lee and Bryk defended their work (1989), criticizing Marsh for employing an overly conservative “vote counting” strategy and using the status at the end of students’ sophomore year as a “pretest” control. Marsh (1989b) stood by his analysis, and Lee continued to add to the body of research with a new study examining the sustained effects of a single-sex high school experience (Lee & Marks, 1990), finding that sex-segregated schools have long term effects for both sexes in terms of college choice and post-college interests, but that the effects for females were also extended to attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. In contrast, male graduates from single-sex schools were less likely to show concerns for social justice and less satisfied with the nonacademic aspects of their colleges.

Marsh also conducted another study (1991) to extend Riordan’s (1985) and Lee and Bryk’s (1986) research, this time looking at whether school type affected growth during the last two years of high school in variables previously unexamined. Though
Marsh questioned Riordan’s results, claiming his research design was inherently weak since his data was limited to that collected in the senior year or later, he saw the value in Riordan’s contention that Catholic schools should be treated as two separate types and incorporated this distinction as a variable; however, the results of his 1991 study contradicted Riordan’s. As Marsh stated, “The discrepant claims are apparently due to the different models used to control for preexisting differences” (p. 339). In the discussion of his results, Marsh identified the HS&B data as problematic since there is no “basis for differentiating between true school-type effects and school-type differences that are due to preexisting differences” (p. 349), but he said that the subsequent National Longitudinal Study of 1988 ought to address this predicament since data were first collected in eighth grade.

LePore and Warren’s study (1997), then, was an especially valuable contribution to this body of work, as it relied on this more comprehensive database. Though these researchers presented both Coleman’s (1961) and Dale’s (1969, 1971, 1974) theories, they did not identify the one with which they aligned themselves; however, they did state that their interest in the study stemmed from their “desire to explore the possibility that single-sex schools are more effective, especially for girls” (p. 499), which suggests affiliation with Coleman. To their surprise, LePore and Warren were unable to “conclude that single-sex Catholic schools are especially advantageous academic settings, at least relative to coeducational Catholic schools” (p. 505); however, they were quick to caution that their research did not discredit those studies that have come before them (Lee &
Bryk, 1986; Riordan, 1985). As the researchers noted, the Catholic school climate has changed since the HS&B data were collected, with many schools closing their doors and sex-segregated schools merging with others or converting to coeducational institutions, making “the demographic distinctions between the student populations of Catholic single-sex and Catholic coeducational schools, as well as the student populations of Catholic and public schools in general” much less pronounced (LePore & Warren, 1997, p. 505).

Because of this change in climate, the early research heralding the values of a (Catholic) single-sex education, while scientifically sound and well executed, should not be used as “proof” of the benefits of a same-sex education in today’s public schools. Indeed, these studies just begin the conversation, and most of them called for more interpretive research to fully understand what caused their findings.

One of the most recent studies of a Catholic, single-sex high school (F. T. Thompson & Austin, 2010) utilized a data set of categorical responses measuring the gender role views of 701 students from a prestigious, Midwestern, all-male, Catholic high school. The researchers found “incongruence between student self-perceptions and the realities of gender role miseducation” (p. 424). For instance, though students rated themselves moderately high in their awareness about women’s issues, 42% of respondents believed the women’s liberation movement contributed to the decline of American family structure, and 49% of students did not feel the feminist movement needed to be further extended and developed. The researchers felt these findings
contrasted with the 73% of students who stated that chauvinism did not have a place in today’s society. Thompson and Austin (2010) found that all-boys' schools are improved if they:

1. co-opt parents to become active partners in promoting women's awareness,
2. adopt meaningful anti-sexist curriculum that is K-12 articulated throughout the district,
3. find a way to capitalize on gender friendliness that students bring into the school as freshmen, sensitivities that somehow become eroded by their senior year, and
4. recruit and retain a student population that reflects racial, economic, and religious diversity—characteristics that appear to have an impact on school climate that is more female sensitive. (p. 441)

The researchers urged that because “male graduates from single-gender schools tend to become leaders within their community,” their teachers need to adopt anti-sexist, critical pedagogy [because they] cannot assume that appropriate gender role education for students who attend schools with no opposite-sex peers will come from parents, or that school influence will be meaningful and balanced without a concerted effort on the part of the administration. (p. 441)

This suggestion echoes points Jolliff and Horne (1999) and Keddie and Mills (2007) made: because they are not adults, boys cannot be held solely responsible for developing gender constructions of themselves and others; they need both male and female adults at the school to teach them these concepts and assist them in their development. This teacher research study marked my “concerted effort” to adopt “anti-sexist, critical pedagogy” to assist in my students’ “gender role education” (Thompson & Austin, 2010, p. 441).

The final study in the section, a dissertation later published as a book (Burke, 2010, 2011), relied on participant observation and critical autoethnography to research how the discourses and ideologies at a Catholic single-sex high school affected its male
students’ gendered possibilities. Burke followed four senior students, one student for a month each, who attended a school that served as his alma mater’s rival (another an all-boys, Catholic school). Though the description of his methods and data analysis were vague, Burke’s recorded observations, interspersed with his own recollections of his school experience, painted a bleak picture where “fag discourse” reigned, pinning pictures of penises to other students’ person or belongings was typical, and “women have, at best, an ancillary role to the main project of masculine bonding” (Burke, 2010, p. 168). However, Burke’s focus fell more to the social realm of the school and provided too few glimpses into the curriculum to try to understand how the school’s teachers and academic life played a part in condoning or challenging the school’s environment. As many of the other researchers I have mentioned did, Burke (2010) called for future studies to pursue what schools “do to and with the boys and girls they enroll and seek to encode through their structure of/and curriculum” (p. 252).

Taken together, the eight studies in this single-sex, Catholic subset confirm the notion that these schools are unique places. However, when comparing single-sex Catholic schools with coeducational ones, the results are inconclusive as to which environment is better for increasing student achievement. The data do suggest, however, that single-sex schooling’s effects are more salient in regard to attitudinal and behavioral measures. Unfortunately, these outcomes for male alumni of single-sex schools are not as favorable, as suggested by Thompson and Austin’s (2010) findings on the students’ gender role miseducation, Burke’s (2010; 2011) depictions of the various hegemonic
gendered discourses he observed, and Lee and Marks’s (1990) results that showed male graduates from single-sex schools were less likely to show concerns for social justice and were less satisfied with the nonacademic aspects of their colleges. Because my study took place in an institution with a stated commitment to social justice and a comprehensive co-curricular program, the findings add to this research conversation.

**Critical Feminist Pedagogy**

In addition to the research on single-sex education, the conceptual and theoretical work detailing critical feminist pedagogy offered some guidance for the work I did to interrupt the cultural biases previously discussed. Darder, Baltodano & Torres (2009) wrote that critical feminist educators utilize a pedagogy that unapologetically centers the voices and lived experiences associated with issues of gender inequalities and heterosexual domination. This entails the creation of counterhegemonic classroom spaces in which students can name their world, while they simultaneously grapple with commonsense notions of gender and sexuality. Linked to this pedagogical intent is the ability of educators to affirm and enable a multiplicity of lived histories, diverse voices, and personal narratives, through creating the conditions for consistent dialogical interaction. (p. 213)

In this study, my classroom gave students the material and space to “name their world” and “grapple with commonsense notions of gender and sexuality” using literature, writing assignments, and open discussion.

Kraver (2007) pointed out that, despite complex theoretical underpinnings, introducing equity issues in the secondary school English curriculum is not unrealistic because teachers “can incorporate many different issues and theories about gender, as well as attendant issues of race and class, into lessons without asking students to confront
daunting jargon” (p. 70). Noddings (1989) offered further advice for feminist curriculum and instruction in the form of four changes to consider:

changes within the subjects of the standard curriculum (such as themes in literature and history), the augmentation of the standard curriculum with new subjects that attend to the traditional concerns of women, changes in instructional patterns, and a total reorganization of the patterns of schooling. (p. 236)

Noddings admitted that the first and third changes, changes within the subjects and in a teacher’s instructional patterns, are the most feasible.

As far as changes within my subject of English, as noted earlier, I chose texts that present multiple views of femininities and masculinities in an effort to encourage gender equity. Noddings (1989) raised an important issue, though, in discussing what to do with works in the traditional (White, male) Western canon. Some argue that we should continue to teach these traditional texts “filled with arrogance, cruelty, gross injustice, and distorted arguments for Western male dominance” (Noddings, 1989, p. 231) because they represent our heritage and allow us to admire, understand, and critique it, which certainly has merit. However, Noddings (1989) pointed out that “we would not dream of requiring our students to read old works of science riddled with errors,” or, in the rare cases when we would because of some greater value the works serve, we would make sure to include other material in the curriculum to “correct the errors” (p. 231). In conducting this research, I made purposeful selections with merit beyond its (sometimes unchallenged) inclusion in the Literary Canon, and I was fortunate to work in a department that offered this freedom and flexibility with curriculum requirements.
To make changes to my instructional patterns, the other shift Noddings (1989) deemed practical, I looked to instructional practices inherent in critical pedagogy. Darder, Baltodano and Torres (2009) wrote, “Critical feminist educators encourage students to contend rigorously with diverse ways of thinking, feeling, and being, as they undertake the arduous task of challenging the recalcitrant institutional sexism that undermines their humanity and self-determination” (p. 213). Two instructional methods present in critical pedagogues’ classrooms are discussion, particularly when it involves “problem-posing” (Freire, 2000), and a close investigation of language. Ira Shor (1992) summarized it best when he wrote that critical instruction involves fostering habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse. (p. 129)

Although Shor’s “habits of thought” could be incorporated in any classroom, the English language arts classroom seems particularly suited for this work. In fact, though none of the pieces state so explicitly, critical feminist pedagogy is the foundation for almost all of the literature I found on gender work.

**English Curriculum**

The bulk of the literature I have consulted focuses on the English curriculum and how to use it to engage students in gender issues. Though the quality of these pieces varies greatly, the wisdom the work offers helped inform this study. This body of work differs from the previously discussed literature in that, while they share some themes,
these pieces stem from the particulars of each teacher’s classroom context and so cannot be generalized in quite the same way. Most of the work offers tried-and-true strategies from other English teachers and classifies as teacher research. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) state: “Teachers’ conceptual research, which consists of theoretical work or the analysis of ideas, includes teachers’ essays on classroom and school life or on the nature of research itself” (p. 26). The conceptual work in this branch of the literature can be organized in five broad categories: gender work in the classroom, literary canon critique, identity construction and practice, gender work with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual, queer or questioning, and intersex (LGBTQI) students, and lesson plans for critical gender work.

**Gender work in the classroom.** These pieces discuss the value of gender diversity in the classroom, the work I conducted with this study, and caution against adopting a “gender-bind” approach, which refers to thinking about masculinity and femininity as a binary oppositional semantic structure. Put together, the conceptual pieces in this subset build a solid argument. Though focused more broadly on issues of multiculturalism, Greene’s work (1993a, 1993b, 1993c) emphasizes the need for a deeper awareness of inequalities and advocates for a curriculum, particularly in Language Arts, that recognizes the “multiple voices silenced over the years” (1993b, p. 13) and makes “them part of the ongoing ‘conversation’ that distinguishes our culture” (1993b, p. 13). She claims such an attention will “empower people to imagine alternative possibilities for themselves” (p. 211). Heeding Greene’s call, Boyd and colleagues (2006) answer the
question, *How might literacy educators learn to recognize, promote, and capitalize upon the rich cultural resources of students in diverse classrooms in the United States?* The authors provide a mission statement of sorts for educators, outlining belief statements that ought to guide our work with the multiple cultures, genders, races, classes, and perspectives students bring to the classroom. Whereas the authors cited so far have mentioned gender under the larger umbrella of multiculturalism, Commeyras (1999) specifically concentrated on gender with her national survey canvassing interest in gender issues among literary educators. Another work traces the history of gender and discrimination since the 1960s and contends that English teachers play pivotal roles in seeking social justice (St. Pierre, 1999), and Pace (2002) offers ways English teachers might do this, citing various NCTE projects.

Turning more toward how English teachers can engage in gender work in the classroom, the last five articles in this subset offer practical suggestions. Gilbert (1992) argues for framing classroom language approaches within critical discourse theory to reveal the gendered nature of literacy practices. McCracken (1996) describes strategies two middle school science teachers used in their classrooms to help students of both sexes resist gender-binding. Lloyd (2006) shows how gender can impact adolescents’ literacy practices within the context of a peer reading group. Taking a more personal approach, another teacher researcher shared her son’s difficulties with literacy and used his story to highlight the literacy gap for boys in the United States (Taylor, 2004). Taylor contends teachers need to honor boys’ out-of-school literacy interests and use strategies
more sensitive to boys’ needs. Martino (1995), another teacher researcher, documented an attempt to open up constructions of masculinity in an English classroom by using a select text that invited male students to take up a counter-hegemonic perspective. Though not all students accepted this viewpoint, Martino adds to the strong argument the pieces in this subset make about the value of this work and the important role English teachers can play in it.

**Literary canon critique.** Several pieces critique the literary canon and offer advice and titles for expanding it with an eye toward gender equity. Pace (1992), for instance, laments how non-representative the literary canon is of our population and how dissenting voices are not included. Greenbaum (1994) concurs, arguing that high school readings lists need to include minorities and women writers: “English curriculum remains narrow nationwide, with the majority of schools (public, parochial and independent) teaching books with a white male viewpoint written by white male authors” (Greenbaum, 1994, p. 38). While the canon may be overwhelmingly male, one author blames “girly” reading lists for contributing to boys’ struggles in English, even while acknowledging that such a view “sounds sexist” (St. Jarre, 2008, p. 15).

The other seven pieces in this category of literature recommend books to help vary and supplement the traditional literary canon. Zeller Carson (1989) notes that while adding women’s voices to reading lists helps female students see feel valued, such curriculum revision also helps male students:

Curriculum changes need to be made for the sake of men and boys. They, too, are being denied the women’s voice and the chance to understand the concerns and
feelings of the other gender. As we try to integrate women into all aspects of our society…it is just as vital for men to know more about women. (p. 30)

Zeller Carson recommends titles to add gender balance to the curriculum, and other authors followed suit. One piece presents seven teachers’ responses to the question, *What work has been the most helpful to you in considering gender issues in the teaching of English?* (Hunter et al., 1993), and another offers an account of a particular book that worked well for exploring such issues with both male and female students (Ruggieri, 2001). Four works that were less relevant to this study particularly focused on how diverse reading lists appeal to female students and what titles teachers might include to reach the girls in their classes (Obbink, 1992; Poster, 1997; Slack, 1999; Sprague & Keeling, 2000). Out of these pieces, two in particular discuss the challenges and benefits of proposing and teaching courses specifically on women’s literature (Poster, 1997; Slack, 1999).

**Identity construction and practice.** Others look specifically at the issue of identity and how it is constructed and practiced in the language arts classroom, with a particular focus on gender identity. The three works in this category took varied approaches to this issue. One researcher documents a 10th grade teacher’s inclusion of an essay by an Irish Catholic homosexual to show that texts can encourage students’ understanding of oppression when they are handled in a thoughtful way that respects diversity (Athanas, 1996). The second piece includes separate accounts from two teacher researchers of how masculinity was negotiated in their respective teacher research projects and the complex issues such work raises (Lensmire & Price, 1998). The final
work is a slightly edited transcript of a conversation between the authors, both literacy researchers (McCarthey & Moje, 2002). In the context of their conversation, they explore “various theories of identity, the relationship between identity and literacy, and how identities and literacies are constructed and practiced within relationships of race, gender, class, and space” (p. 228).

**Gender work with LGBTQI students.** Another subset looks at how gender work in the classroom positively affects LGBTQI students. Mollie Blackburn, sometimes working with others, has contributed significantly to this body of work (Blackburn, 2002/2003, 2005, 2006; Blackburn & Buckley, 2005; Blackburn & Smith, 2010). She argues that heteronormativity, which implies that homosexuality is abnormal, is enforced in schools, and therefore teachers need to examine their own prejudices and think about how their attitudes might affect the gender-noncomforming students in their classes. Much of her work focuses on literacy groups she has conducted with LGBTQI students, which she draws upon to offer recommendations to teachers on making their classrooms more equitable for LGBTQI youth. She contends: “By making ‘gender trouble’ in our literacy teaching and research, we reject the reification of categories based on fictions that perpetuate inequitable power dynamics, and we accept people in all of their diversity, multiplicity, variability, and complexity” (Blackburn, 2005, p. 414).

Three other researchers share Blackburn’s vision of a classroom more inclusive of gender-nonconforming students (Crisp & Knezek, 2010; North, 2010). Crisp and Knezek (2010) present a series of steps students and teachers can take to include conversations
about sexual identity when discussing texts, asserting that teachers need to foster critical
dialogue about how texts construct “what it means and looks like to be gay” (p. 77).
North (2010) features his work in a higher education social studies methods course to
make the point that teachers have a responsibility to critically investigate their teaching
practices to ensure they are not reinforcing harmful beliefs, particularly regarding
LGBTQI people.

The last piece in this subset of the literature focuses specifically on intersex
students (Breu, 2009), stressing that these students in particular need to see themselves
reflected in the literature choices we make because they “often feel that they are going
through their experiences absolutely alone” (p. 107). Breu offers teachers information
and curriculum ideas for teaching about issues intersex people face.

**Lesson plans for critical gender work.** Most articles, however, offer lesson plan
ideas for looking at gender with a critical eye (Brozo & Schmelzer, 1997; Bruce et al.,
2008; Cleary & Whittemore, 1999; Consiglio, 1999; Croker, 1999; Greenbaum, 1999;
Harper, 1998; Kraver, 2007; Lawrence, 1995; McClure, 1999; Mitchell, 1996;
O'Donnell-Allen & Smagorinsky, 1999; Pace, 2003; Perrin, 1999; Ressler, 2005;
Styslinger, 2004; Zumhagen, 2005). Because these pieces are so varied, rather than
discuss them each in turn, I offer a summary of the ideas they propose, particularly
focusing on the suggestions I incorporated in this study. Some lesson plans detail pre-
reading activities that prepare students to talk about gendered readings of texts, such as
finishing the sentence, “Being a man means…” and reading character descriptions devoid
of pronouns to encourage mindfulness of the gendered assumptions students bring to their reading. These teachers advocate the use of such activities as journal writing, particularly dual-entry writing to “try on” the perspectives of other genders. They chronicle the various ways we can help students deconstruct texts with an eye toward thinking critically about gender, some posing general questions that could encourage gender exploration applicable to any text. Others recommend media tie-ins to demonstrate how gender pervades our everyday lives. While often tied to specific texts a teacher used, most of the suggestions from this body of work were applicable to my study.

Although the articles about lesson plans are based on teachers’ experiences, empirical studies on English classrooms that analyze how their lessons played out are less prolific. The research in this area relies on qualitative methods to study the classroom discourse surrounding gender (Alvermann et al., 1997; Bender-Slack, 2010; A. Godley, 2006; A. J. Godley, 2003; Hiller & Johnson, 2007; Pace & Townsend, 1999; Styslinger, 1999), or surveys of students and teachers on the value of gender-inclusive work (Benjamin & Irwin-DeVitis, 1998; Blackburn & Buckley, 2005; Lundeberg, 1997). Some studies that investigated classroom discourse found that teacher attentiveness to gendered language promotes productive student discourse, but students’ preconceived ideas about gender, particularly behavior they regarded as feminine, sometimes constrained the dialogue (Alvermann et al., 1997; Bender-Slack, 2010; Godley, 2006; Godley, 2003). Other studies focused on differences between groups. Hiller and Johnson (2007) studied a secondary teacher’s English classroom and noted the stark differences in
how she spoke to male and female students, concluding that her language operated to
privilege the males. Pace and Townsend (1999) took a different approach and compared
the discourse of a college level class to a high school class using the same text, *Hamlet.*
Interestingly, when speaking about the characters Hamlet and Gertrude, the college
students confined them to stereotypical gender roles, yet the high school students
contested such stereotypes. The final study researching classroom discourse focused on
peer revision groups. Styslinger (1999) studied her male and female students’
contributions during the peer revision process, and her observations convinced her that
the adage “men are from Mars, women are from Venus” rings true.

Other empirical studies relied on survey data. Lundeberg (1997) worked with
preservice teachers to see if they could detect gender bias in a classroom. After a unit on
gender equity in the classroom, the preservice teachers heard a subtly biased class
discussion on sex bias and rated the discussion on gender equity. Most considered the
discussion equitable and needed further help to notice the inequity. Benjamin and Irwin-
DeVitis (1998) surveyed students in a summer literature group as well as almost 1,000
teenagers in various parts of New York and Louisiana. Their findings confirm the work
mentioned earlier by the AAUW (1992) and the Sadkers (1994); girls did not see their
lives reflected in school-assigned literature, nor did they feel it was okay to appear smart
in class or speak up about gender-related injustices in class, such as reading about
primarily male characters. Blackburn and Buckley (2005) used survey data from a
random stratified sampling of 600 U.S. high schools from the 2002 U.S. Department of
Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). They asked the schools whether they used “materials that addressed same-sex desire in the English language curriculum, and, if so, what materials were used” (p. 205). Only 8.49% of respondents said they used such materials, and of that small amount, most acknowledged using only one such text, or said that only one class included such material. By asking for what materials schools used, Blackburn and Buckley discovered that some schools counted works authored by a LGBTQ writer, even if the piece did not include same-sex desire in the book (Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* was one such example).

**Gender Issues in All-Boys English Classrooms**

The final, perhaps most applicable body of literature is those works that consider gender issues in the all-boys English classroom. Studying an Australian Catholic, coeducational school’s move to implement single-sex classes as a strategy to engage boys in the English classroom, Martino and Meyenn (2002) conducted semi-structured interviews with seven English teachers. They found that the teachers’ assumptions and knowledge about gender influenced the pedagogical practices they engaged in. The teachers’ thinking and actions varied widely, leaving the researchers to conclude “that single-sex classes as a strategy per se do not necessarily produce enhanced social and educational outcomes for students” (p. 303).

On the surface, Corso’s (2006) study most closely resembles mine in that it is a teacher research study by a woman teaching English in an all-boys school that is part of the U.S. Xaverian Brothers network. Her experiences led her to believe that teaching
creative writing in an all-male environment was difficult, often deemed “girly” or “gay,” so she experimented with “translytic” poetry, which is a poem that interprets a pictogram or a foreign text on the basis of the image itself. She also opted not to grade the work to remove the boys’ fear of failure. She concluded: “Removing the quality-based grade enables our students to focus on the writing process. By providing a pictogram, we enable male adolescent students to write without fear of expression” (p. 173).

Hatchell (2006) studied the ways in which teens perceived war and violence and related gender discourses at an Australian Year 10 English classroom at a private boys’ school. Using interviews with the female teacher and her students, Hatchell found that “the male students in this study tended to appropriate violence as a masculine domain and believe that females only participated on a passive, non-violent level” (p. 392). Likewise, the teacher’s “emphasis on patriotism and mateship provided a reading of the text about archetypal male bonding in the extremities of war mainly within a masculinist discourse, even though her aims were to deconstruct gender and hegemonic masculinity issues” (p. 394).

Another Australian researcher has contributed greatly to this body of work. Keddie’s studies focus on teacher-student interactions in all-boys secondary schools, often in English classrooms given the amount of discussion involved. In one piece (Keddie, 2007), she argues that Australia’s gender reform efforts, such as “Boys: Getting it right,” silences issues of gender injustice, power, and hegemonic masculinity because it focuses on standards rather than social justice. To demonstrate her point, she presents the
story of a female English teacher who demonstrated a commitment to her students and her teaching, but whose students sexually harassed and intimidated her by invoking discourses of masculinity. Keddie contends that the larger, masculinist structures of the school undermined the teacher’s efforts and failed to protect her, empowering her students. She concludes, “ignoring issues of power and masculinity in broader policy and school discourse reinforces sexual intimidation and harassment as effective resources for boys who wish to transgress the traditional teacher-student, adult-child binary to undermine their female teachers’ expertise and professionalism” (p. 33). In another study, Keddie (2008a) observed a male English teacher with a commitment to pursuing gender justice through critical literacy. Though the teacher scaffolded his students’ critical analysis in texts, his “privileging rationality, control, the mind and ‘masculinity’” (p. 579), constrained his efforts. Keddie argues for “the importance of teachers’ interrogating their classrooms as lived texts where the relations of domination and power that derail the social justice possibilities of critical literacy can be made both recognisable and revisable” (p. 571).

In the final work in this subset, Keddie, working with Mills (2009), argues that schools are not “excessively feminized” (p. 30) and that “boy-friendly remedies serve in many ways to further reinforce gender divisions that privilege ‘the masculine’” (p. 30). The researchers draw on teacher interviews and classroom observations from a larger study of secondary English and humanities teachers from the same all-boys school to highlight the school’s masculinized spaces and contend that boy-friendly pedagogy in
such a school “would be highly inappropriate in terms of promoting gender justice” (p 29). The six teachers whose voices are featured in the article share concerns about the school culture and “demonstrate productive efforts to challenge [the masculinized] spaces in gender-just ways” (p. 32). They did so in various ways, from deliberating choosing texts to “fill the ‘silence’ surrounding females and issues of femininity” (p. 36) to designing a research project that required students to develop a hypothesis about a particular group and then spend time with members of that group and revise that hypothesis, examine the assumptions they made in the first place. The examples from the six teachers illuminate how masculinized spaces can be disrupted.

The work in this specific section suggests that while all-male English classes are ripe grounds for employing gender lenses, interrupting students’ (and teachers’) beliefs is not easy in a single-sex classroom, particularly for a female teacher, and the difficulty may in fact result in reifying stereotypical gender-bound subscriptions.
Chapter Three
Studying His-land: Research Methodology & Design

For this dissertation, I investigated how gender was constructed in my single-sex English classroom and how the school culture shaped my students’ and my gender constructions. The primary goal of this study was to analyze my students’ and my attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs about gender that were highlighted during a unit designed to bring the topic of gender to the forefront by studying our interactions with each other, both written and verbal. In order to do this, I adopted an inquiry stance, defined by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) as “a framework that repositions practitioners at the center of educational transformation by capitalizing on their collective intellectual capacity when working in collaboration with many other stakeholders in the educational process” (p. 153). Using qualitative forms of data collection drawn from the research site of my St. Albert’s English classroom, I conducted a teacher research dissertation, described in this chapter.

Teacher Research

Teacher research, defined as “systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom worlds” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, pp. 23-24), is an appropriate research methodology for critical practitioners because it emphasizes that practitioners are knowledge generators, not just recipients or implementers. As Kincheloe (2008) asserts,

in the new right-wing educational order that exists in the twenty-first century, knowledge is something that is produced far away from the school by experts in an exalted domain. This must change if a critical reform of schooling is to ever
take place. Teachers must have more say, more respect, in the culture of education. Teachers must join the culture of researchers if a new level of educational rigor and quality is ever to be achieved. (p. 17)

Ainscow (2008) concurs, contending, “teachers are the key to the development of more inclusive forms of education. Their beliefs, attitudes and actions are what create the contexts in which children and young people are required to learn” (p. 240). Involving teachers in the research process results in “exemplary contributions to instructional improvement” (Nolen & Putten, 2007, p. 401). As noted in the previous chapters, teachers’ (and students’) voices and perspectives are noticeably absent from the academic conversation about single-sex schooling, and the insider knowledge their lived experiences of their institutions can contribute to the literature would be valuable.

**History of Teacher Research**

Teacher research reflects a paradigm shift from the long history of traditional educational research. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) point out, for much of the history of research on teaching, teachers and their work have been the topics of study. They have been researched rather than the researchers. As subjects of research conducted by university-based scholars, teachers have been in effect the objects of study. (p. 1)

Even research that seeks to study teachers’ thought processes rather than just their classrooms “continues to objectify teaching and often ignores teachers’ roles as theorizers, interpreters, and critics of their own practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 1). Yet, teachers are expected to incorporate research in their quest to bring “best practices” to their classrooms. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) point out the unfortunate irony: “[T]hroughout their careers, teachers are expected to learn about their own
profession not by studying their own experiences but by studying the findings of those who are not themselves school-based teachers” (p. 1). In essence, teachers are supposed to learn about their work from an outsider who has studied their work.

Shulman (1986) identifies two dominant paradigms of research on teaching: process-product research, “the most vigorous and productive of the programs” (p. 9), and classroom ecology research, “an utterly different set of intellectual traditions” (p. 18). As the name implies, process-product work consists of research that studies what teachers do in the classroom – “the process” – and what happens to their students as a result – “the product.” Often, this research looks at student achievement outcomes and decontextualizes analyses. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) explain:

This approach emphasizes the actions of teachers rather than their professional judgments and attempts to capture the activity of teaching by identifying sets of discrete behaviors reproducible from one teacher and one classroom to the next. … With this view, the primary knowledge source for the improvement of practice is research on classroom phenomena that can be observed. This research has a perspective that is “outside-in”… (p. 6)

In contrast, classroom ecology work is “more often qualitative than quantitative methodologically” (Shulman, 1986, p. 18). As its name implies, classroom ecology research is interested in the contextual landscape of the classroom, the interactions between teachers and students, and the “unobservable processes, such as thoughts, attitudes, feelings, or perceptions of the participants” (Shulman, 1986, p. 19). The focus on particular settings and the particular actions that occur within them is a shift from process-product research, but Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) note, “research on teaching within both process-product paradigms and interpretive paradigms constrains
and at times even makes invisible teachers’ roles in the generation of knowledge about teaching and learning in classrooms” (p. 7).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999, 2004) outline three knowledge-practice relationships that offer another way of framing the paradigms of research on teaching and how knowledge is generated: knowledge for practice, knowledge in practice, and knowledge of practice. Knowledge for practice refers to “general theories and research-based findings on a wide range of foundational and applied topics that together constitute the basic domains of knowledge about teaching and teacher education” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2004, p. 611). It is the job of the skilled teacher to implement this knowledge in his or her classroom practices. Knowledge in practice refers to “what many people have called practical knowledge” (p. 612). This knowledge-practice relationship includes the realities and peculiarities of daily classroom life that can only be known from experiencing it. Knowledge of practice, in contrast, does not divide formal knowledge from practical knowledge; instead, it refers to the knowledge that practitioners can generate when they “theorize and construct their work and…connect it to larger social, cultural, and political issues” (p. 614).

Teacher research falls under knowledge of practice because practitioners are using their emic, or insider’s perspective of their classrooms to collect, analyze, and interpret data that can then be used to theorize. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) explain, “when teachers do research, they draw on interpretive frameworks built from their histories and intellectual interests, and because the research process is embedded in
practice, the relationship between knower and known is significantly altered” (p. 43). Traditionally, researchers outside the classroom generate knowledge on teaching, and teachers access that knowledge and use it to improve their practice. In teacher research, however, practitioners become the legitimate “knower,” the “known” being their own classrooms and school contexts.

Shifting the teacher from “subject” and “knowledge consumer” to “researcher” and “knowledge generator” is not a new concept. For instance, at the turn of the last century, John Dewey “urged educators to be both consumers and producers of knowledge about teaching – both teachers and students of classroom life” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 9). In this way, teachers are reflective practitioners who study their classroom life and, in the process, build theory from their practice, a paradigm shift echoed by Stenhouse, founder of the University of East Anglia’s Center for Applied Research in Education in 1970, who was an early proponent of action research. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) cite, “Stenhouse’s argument was radical: He claimed that research was the route to teacher emancipation and that ‘researchers [should] justify themselves to practitioners, not practitioners to researchers’” (p. 8). From these early roots, the teacher research movement was born and has gained more legitimacy in recent decades. Aside from widespread professional learning communities and teacher research groups across the United States and elsewhere, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) point to “the proliferation of guides and handbooks intended to support new practitioner researchers”
as “an indication of the robustness and inherent optimism of the practitioner inquiry movement” (p. 19).

**Tenets of Teacher Research**

Practitioner inquiry is a methodology of many forms and names that can make it difficult to properly label and define. Herr & Anderson (2005), for example, identify 16 terms in current use, including “teacher research” and “action research.” Each of the terms connotes different purposes, ideologies, and historical traditions; however, as Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s (2009) figure below attests, whether it’s called action research, teacher research, or self study, research that falls under the larger umbrella term “practitioner inquiry” shares the same features and faces the same criticism.
Figure 3.1. Practitioner inquiry: The issues that unite and divide (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 39)

**COMMON CHARACTERISTICS:**
- Practitioner as researcher
- Assumptions about links of knowledge, knowers, and knowing
- Community and collaboration
- Blurred boundaries between inquiry and practice
- New conceptions of validity and generalizability
- Systematicity, including data collection and analysis
- Publicity, public knowledge, and critique

Practitioner as researcher. As stated earlier, and as clear from the umbrella term “practitioner inquiry,” the first shared feature of this work is that “the practitioner himself or herself simultaneously takes on the role of researcher” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 41). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) explain:

[Teachers] have opportunities to observe learners over long periods of time and in a variety of academic and social situations; they often bring many years of knowledge about the culture of the community, school, and classroom; and they
experience the ongoing events of classroom life in relation to their particular roles and responsibilities. This set of lenses sets the perspectives of teachers apart from those of others who look into classrooms. (p. 15)

“Practitioner” might also mean principal, university faculty member, fieldwork supervisor, or any other educational practitioner who utilizes his or her insider knowledge.

**Assumptions about links of knowledge, knowers, and knowing.** In practitioner inquiry, the teacher is the knower, the learner, and the researcher, a unique role that belies the assumption of practitioner inquiry “that those who work in particular educational contexts and/or who live in particular social situations have significant knowledge about those situations” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 42).

**Community and collaboration.** Often, practitioner inquiry involves collaboration among the involved participants. I mentioned one such example in my review of the literature (Rodrick & Tracy, 2001) when a teacher teamed with her university professor to study her own classroom. Other situations might include a team of teachers from different schools researching a program they are each implementing in their own classrooms, or veteran and new faculty members studying school culture.

**Blurred boundaries between inquiry and practice.** When the teacher is a researcher and her own professional context is the research site, the boundaries between inquiry and practice are blurred. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) note,

In the university context, blurring boundaries and roles allows for innovative programs of research and new kinds of knowledge…In contrast, when school-based practitioners take on roles as researchers, different kinds of tensions and
problems emerge, including the concern that research steals time and energy away from the more important activity of teaching. (p. 43)

These blurred boundaries make teacher research a challenging endeavor and are one of the sources of criticism of teacher research, which I address later.

**New conceptions of validity and generalizability.** Another shared feature of practitioner inquiry is the application of different criteria for validity and generalizability, which “are quite different from the traditional criteria” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 43). Citing Zumwalt (1982), Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) acknowledge that “generalizations about teaching and learning are by definition context free” (p. 15), yet it is difficult to believe that any human behavior, in classrooms or elsewhere, is truly divorced from context. Instead, they argue, “we need insight into the particulars of how and why something works and for whom it works within the contexts of particular classrooms” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 15). Rather than apply the typical standards of validity and generalizability to teacher research, though, they suggest new criteria put forth by Anderson et al. (1994, 2007), which includes democratic validity (honoring the perspectives and interests of all stakeholders), outcome validity (resolving the problems addressed), process validity (using appropriate and adequate research methods and inquiry processes), catalytic validity (deepening the understandings of all the participants), and dialogic validity (monitoring analyses through critical and reflective discussion with peers). (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 44)

**Systematicity, including data collection and analysis.** Practitioner inquiry is not merely a write-up of a story from a teacher’s classroom; rather, it involves “systematic documentation [that] resembles the forms of data collection used in other
qualitative studies” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 44). By “systematic,” Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) “refer primarily to ordered ways of gathering and recording information, documenting experiences inside and outside of classrooms, and making some kind of written record” (p. 24). I describe the particular processes I used for data collection and analysis later in this chapter.

**Publicity, public knowledge, and critique.** The final shared characteristic of various forms of practitioner inquiry is the emphasis on making the work public for the larger community and inviting peers and other participants to critique the teacher-researcher’s analysis. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) acknowledge “at least four important ways in which the academic community can learn from teacher research” (p. 20): 1) the rich data about classroom life teacher research yields can help academic construct new theories of teaching and learning; 2) practitioner inquiry reveals the issues teachers regard important; 3) case studies resulting from teacher research adds to the knowledge base of teaching and helps to prepare future generations of teachers; and 4) teacher research “contribute[s] to the critique and revision of existing theory” (p. 20) given that teachers’ research questions often result from a discrepancy between what outsider research claims to be true and what teachers witness in their own classrooms.

**Critiques of Teacher Research**

Including teachers as legitimate researchers makes this methodology open to criticism and controversy. Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1993) identified three forms of critique – knowledge, methods, and ends – and later revised and expanded the critiques to
six types – knowledge, methods, science, ethics, political, and personal/professional development (2009). They summarize,

The critiques are tied to fundamental ideas about what counts in the first place as research, data, knowledge, evidence, and effectiveness, and who in the final analysis can legitimately be regarded as a knower about issues related to teaching, learning, and teacher development. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 46)

The “knowledge critique” disputes the value of the knowledge action research generates, if any, particularly when done by teachers. The “methods critique” casts doubt on how rigorous and “scientific” the research process can be, particularly when one has the dual role of researcher and participant. A subset of the previous two critiques, the “science critique” focuses on the generalizability, or lack thereof, of teacher research, and considers practitioner research too “idiosyncratic” to be considered scientific (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Focusing on the “blurred boundaries” feature of practitioner inquiry mentioned earlier, the “ethics critique” views the dual role of teacher-researcher as a detriment because of the conflicts of interest teachers face when studying their own practice, classroom, and students. The “political critique” criticizes the action research that is “more or less instrumental and lacks clear connections to larger social and political agendas” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 20). On the other hand, traditional researchers also invoke the political critique with practitioner inquiry that does “have a political agenda related to equity or social justice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 47) because such work is considered advocacy rather than objective research. The final critique, “personal/professional development critique” is related to the two-pronged political critique. This critique is based on the idea that teacher research is a political act
whose power is lost when it is integrated into existing institutional agendas for professional development or teacher leadership. Likewise, when practitioner research takes the form of self-study or incorporates an autobiographical stance, some believe the work is too self-absorbed to truly “count.”

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) rightly point out that most critiques “are intended to safeguard traditional approaches to knowledge generation and teacher development and preserve the hegemony of outside experience” (p. 47). I do not mean to take up the debates on the value of different research paradigms, but as my earlier review of the literature shows, teachers have not been at the heart of the research on single-sex education, so a paradigm shift would be fruitful to the discussion about these environments.

Teacher Research as Feminist Methodology

The inquiry stance I adopted for this project “is what critical theorists have called a counterhegemonic notion in that it challenges the ideas about teaching, learning, learners, diversity, knowledge, practice, expertise, evidence, school organization, and educational reform that are implicit or explicit in the dominant educational regime” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 3). This “counterhegemonic notion” in addition to feminist pedagogy influenced my research methodology as much as it did my instruction, as feminist theory was inherent in my choice to embark on a teacher research project. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) state

Classrooms with a feminist pedagogy, which explicitly make issues of knowledge, authority, and institutional hierarchies part of the curriculum
Lather (1992) notes, “Feminist research has from its beginnings been preoccupied with the politics of knowing and being known” (p. 91). Therefore, teacher research’s upsetting the power balance in making the teacher the researcher rather than the subject of knowledge or receiver of knowledge, as more traditional research has done, is inherently feminist. Maguire (2006) acknowledged this when she wrote, “Feminist theory is a relatively unacknowledged force at the heart of participatory forms of action research” because it restructures “the power dynamics of the research process” (p. 62). As Maguire (2006) points out, “Jointly, feminist and action research can be powerful allies in the effort to harness research as one resource in the struggle to dismantle the interlocking systems of oppression and domination in our lives” (p. 67).

**Researcher Positionality**

Haag (2002) states in her research review, “Assessments of single-sex education’s ‘success’ or ‘failure’…are contingent on the goals of the stakeholders” (p. 648). Likewise, Campbell and Wahl (2002) urge us to question our assumptions in order to avoid inaccurate conclusions. In consideration of these warnings, I identify what I “bring” to this topic beyond what I have mentioned earlier.

Though a product of a coeducational public system through high school, I grew up with a feminist mother who attended a Catholic, all-girls high school. A physical therapist, she excelled in math and science and has occupied various leadership positions
throughout her career, such as serving as the Director of Rehabilitation Services at our local hospital. As stated earlier, my husband graduated from the same all-boys, Catholic high school at which I have taught English for the past eleven years, and, at the time of this study, he had been teaching 5\textsuperscript{th} grade language arts for seven years. In a certain sense, the example of my mother aligns with what the research suggests about the value of same-sex education for girls: it allows them to excel in typically male-dominated subjects like math and science and provides them with more leadership opportunities (J. S. Thompson, 2003). My husband’s situation corroborates some of the research findings on single-sex education’s effect on boys: it “frees” boys to pursue more feminized subjects like English and the arts (James & Richards, 2003), and, in the case of my husband, elementary education. I deem both my mother and husband’s outcomes as positive, which, in so much as they are the result of their single-sex educational upbringings, complicates my view on the value of single-sex offerings.

My feelings about single-sex education and, in particular, St. Albert’s, are also complicated by my children and their possible educational futures. Should I continue to be employed at St. Albert’s by the time my son is old enough to enroll, he can attend the school for free. However, if I wish to enroll my daughter in an area private school, there is no reciprocity of tuition remission for daughters of faculty, nor is there even a sister school in the area for her to attend (the nearest single-sex school for girls is over 20 miles away). When I started teaching at St. Albert’s, I only had my daughter, and it did not occur to me that this arrangement would bother me, nor did I give it any thought when
my son was born during the second year of my tenure, probably because I did not imagine myself teaching at St. Albert’s long enough to grapple with this inequity. Nonetheless, when my daughter was old enough to talk but not old enough to know otherwise, whenever we drove by St. Albert’s, she would say, “That’s Mommy’s school. I’m going there someday!” and I would feel a pang of regret for having to tell her that she could not by virtue of being a girl. My guilt for being associated with an organization that would exclude my daughter but accept my son was further compounded when my son was old enough to realize his privileged position and correct my daughter’s statement for me: “You can’t go there, but I can,” he would often teasingly, but truthfully, reply to her. As my children get closer to their teenaged years, I still grapple with these mixed feelings.

As a feminist female teacher in an all-boys school where the administration and faculty has been predominantly male, I am also acutely aware of gender issues as they play out in the interactions between teacher-student, teacher-administrator, and teacher-teacher. I wholeheartedly believe that one’s role as a teacher changes when placed in the context of a single-sex classroom, regardless of the teacher’s or student body’s sex; for instance, one international study conducted on this topic showed male teachers in an all-boys school felt they needed to “police” their own masculinity (Martino & Frank, 2006) and the female teachers in Keddie’s research of all-boys schools in Australia had difficulty interrupting the masculinized spaces because, in some cases, they were also battling sexual harassment from their students (Keddie, 2007, 2008a; Keddie & Mills,
My time at St. Albert’s has only heightened my awareness of gendered interactions both in and out of the classroom, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 6.

I must also point out that shortly after data collection and analysis, and during the process of writing this dissertation, my role at St. Albert’s changed when I applied and was hired for the position of Assistant Principal for Academics, Grades 9 & 10. Because this role change occurred after I collected and analyzed the data for this study, I do not believe this new position affected my positionality in this research, but I do concede that it made it difficult for me to actually write my findings, as I felt I was somehow betraying an organization of which I was now at the helm. Though I was never quite able to reconcile this feeling of disloyalty and the thought that maybe I was being too critical, I am grateful to colleagues who pointed out that it was the data that was critical, not me. Some coworkers and students further encouraged me to keep writing because, in conversations with me about my findings, they expressed gratitude that I was giving theory to, and therefore somehow validating, their experiences. I can only hope their words ring true. I further theorize my role in this work in Chapter 6.

**Research Site**

Like other teacher researchers, my research questions emerged from an intersection of theory and practice in the classroom, specifically in the single-sex school at which I currently teach. Therefore, conducting this study at St. Albert’s made sense given my long history and affiliation with the school. Though I considered various ways of studying gender construction at St. Albert’s, I ultimately used my own English
classroom as the research site for a few different reasons. First, my interest in this work stems from the “local knowledge” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 45) I acquired from my role as a teacher. As noted earlier, I became increasingly interested in how the students and I constructed gender in the all-male environment of the school. Second, because I was just as interested in my own role in constructing gender at my school as I was in my students’ roles in this process, it was necessary to study my classroom practice. Finally, and most importantly, I wanted to be responsible for the curriculum and pedagogical choices that put gender issues in sharp relief. Other teachers in my department may have engaged their classes in similar texts and activities, but I did not want to rely on someone else to do so by asking to study his or her classroom and, again, doing so would not allow me to study my role in the class’s gender construction. As Carr & Kemmis (1986) note, “The ‘outsider’ researcher may interpret or inform these practices, but does not constitute them, has limited power to transform them, and rarely lives with the consequences of any actual transformations that occur” (p. 159). As such, I wanted to be the one “informing” and “transforming” the curricula, constituting the instructional decisions, and living with, and studying, the consequences of these transformations. A practitioner research study best allowed me to do this work because, as Anderson, Herr & Nihlen (2007) state, with practitioner research

the researcher is also an actor in the site, so rather than strictly documenting the culture of the workplace, researchers are using data in such a way as to inform their own actions as well as contribute to knowledge production in education. (p. 158)
St. Albert’s is one of thirteen Xaverian Brothers Sponsored Schools (XBSS) in the United States. The XBSS “is a network of Roman Catholic secondary schools who share a common mission and a similar governance structure” (Xaverian Brothers Sponsored Schools), but each school has its own identity and enacts its mission in different ways rooted in the Xaverian spiritual values, also known as charisms – compassion, humility, simplicity, trust, and zeal. Out of the thirteen XBSS schools, eight are all-boys’ institutions (there are no all-girls’ schools).

Over the past 45 years, the personnel within the XBSS network have changed. The Xaverian Brothers and other clergy members made up the majority of the schools’ staffs until the 1970s. 1965 marked the peak of the Xaverian Brothers’ teaching influence. Staffing records from five of the eight all-boys’ XBSS schools show that religious men comprised 69% of the full time teachers in the 1964-1965 school year; lay men made up 26.6% of the faculty, and 4.3% of the teaching staff were lay women (Xaverian Brothers, 2004). During the 1970s, a decline in vocations to the Xaverian Brothers resulted in a shift to a greater lay faculty presence in the XBSS schools; by 1985, only 20.2% of the full teaching staff were Xaverian Brothers compared to 60% lay men and 18.1% lay women (Xaverian Brothers, 2004). By 2004, these numbers shifted even more drastically to 4.8% religious men, 68.8% lay men and 26.2% lay women.

St. Albert’s faculty history is similar. Seven brothers staffed the school when it opened as a secondary boarding school for boys over 100 years ago. When the first three lay faculty members joined the school in 1940, including the first woman teacher, they
joined thirteen brothers (Larrabee, 2007). By the 1968-1969 school year, 25 brothers and 18 lay faculty were on staff to serve the roughly 630 day students and 170 resident students. The attrition of the Xaverian Brothers and the increase in day students contributed to the end of the boarding program, which was phased out by 1974 (Larrabee, 2007).

Rather unique to the school’s history was its brief period as a coeducational school. Growing financial woes and the end of the residence program coincided with the sudden closing of two local Catholic girls’ schools in 1971. Parents and alumni with daughters at the schools urged St. Albert’s to accept the displaced female students. The school’s trustees made a short-term agreement to accept girls, and 16 enrolled in 1971. Before the coed program ended in 1977, 75 women joined the ranks of St. Albert’s alumni.

At the time of this study, St. Albert’s 175-acre campus served over 1,100 boys from over 80 communities across two states. Though many of the students came from families with high socioeconomic status, 30% of the student body received financial aid from the nearly $3 million annual tuition assistance fund. The school had also made concerted efforts to increase diversity, enrolling approximately 10% students of color. Students also brought different faith backgrounds, with 30% of the families declaring a religion other than Catholic. The faculty was also more diverse than in previous decades; during the 2011-2012 school year, only four Xaverian brothers served on the teaching faculty alongside 64 lay men and 34 lay women.
Guided by the Xaverian charisms, St. Albert’s mission stated:

St. Albert’s School, a Catholic, Xaverian Brothers sponsored secondary school for young men, is committed to educating the whole person. Our rigorous academic and extensive co-curricular program encourages students to develop their spiritual, intellectual, moral, physical, and creative potential, and inspires them to honor the diversity that enriches both our school community and the world beyond St. Albert’s. We challenge our young men to grow in faith and wisdom, to promote human dignity, to act with compassion and integrity, to pursue justice and peace, and to live lives of service to society.

To this end, the school offered a variety of service opportunities, over 60 afterschool clubs and co-curricular activities, and 20 different sports; over 90% of the student population participated in a club, and 67% of students played on an athletic team. Nine departments made up the school’s academic curriculum: computer science, English, fine arts, mathematics, physical education, religious studies, science, social studies, and world languages. In order to graduate from St. Albert’s, students had to take at least four years of English, mathematics, and religious studies; three years of social studies; two years of world languages; and at least one semester each of computer science, fine arts, and physical education. There was no formal collaboration between departments by way of cross-listed or co-taught courses, though coursework sometimes dovetailed; for instance, juniors took English 3, which focused on American literature, and the junior social studies course was U.S. History.

Though it varied by department and grade level, academic subjects were offered at four different levels: college preparatory (CP), accelerated, honors, and advanced placement (AP). Incoming freshmen took placement tests to ensure they were in appropriately leveled classes. English, math, science, social studies, and world languages
offered freshmen courses at the CP, accelerated, and honors levels, and religious studies
and fine arts courses were not leveled in the freshmen year. Students then moved up or
down in levels depending on performance and interest in the subject. Electives were
typically offered at the accelerated or honors level, often with each student able to choose
which level he wished to pursue, with the coursework adapted accordingly.

Upon the recommendation of the New England Association of Schools and
Colleges (NEASC) during the school’s reaccreditation process a few years prior, St.
Albert’s moved to a rotating block schedule for the 2010-2011 school year, which was
modified slightly for the 2011-2012 school year. Prior to this schedule, the school day
consisted of seven classes, each 42 minutes in length. Students and faculty alike felt the
pace was frenetic, and students expressed concern over the homework load; on average,
teachers are expected to assign a half hour per class per night. The new schedule
included five classes labeled by letter (i.e., A block, B block, etc.), each a full hour in
length, that rotated on a seven-day cycle labeled by number (i.e., “Day 1”). At the time
of this study, faculty were still adapting their course content and instructional methods to
fit this new schedule, as many found it challenging to cover the same amount of material
they did in previous years. Still, even though members of the school community needed
to remind each other what “day” it was and whether a particular class would meet, the
general consensus was that the schedule was a welcome improvement.

The English department was more accepting of this schedule than other
departments, partly because while the courses we offered built on each other, no class
picked up where the previous year left off, so there was less pressure to have to cover a
certain amount of material by the end of the school year. The department described its
goals and course sequence as follows:

Success in the modern world depends more than ever on communication
skills. The English Department engages students in the challenge to acquire the
skills necessary for successful communication: reading, thinking, analyzing and
writing. Through literature, writing assignments and class discussions, we seek to
introduce students to the issues and ideas that will help them to explore their own
identity and the nature of the world around them.

Ninth grade English begins with a focus on the study skills necessary for
success at St. Albert’s. Through exercises that involve reading and composition
assignments students learn note taking, outlining, analytical, and organizational
skills. The literary focus of the ninth grade exposes the students to the four major
genres: novels, short stories, poetry and drama. Tenth grade English is divided
into a study of archetypes in literature and the study of tragedy. Eleventh grade
English presents a chronological study of American literature and twelfth grade
English centers on a chronological study of British literature. (St. Albert’s
website)

In addition to the courses mentioned above, the department also offered two
journalism electives, Introduction to Print Journalism, and Journalism II, courses I
designed and proposed in 2005. Introduction to Print Journalism was added to the
schedule for the 2006-2007 school year and Journalism II was added the following year
for students wishing to take the course again in addition to holding an editor position on
the student newspaper. Since its inception, one or both courses have run each year except
for the 2011-2012 school year due to an English faculty member’s departure, which did
not allow for enough faculty to cover the core classes. A third elective, Writing Portfolio,
was added to the schedule in the 2011-2012 school year. All three electives are full year
courses open to only juniors and seniors.
During the academic year in which I conducted this study, I taught two of the five offered sections of English 1 at the accelerated level and one of the three sections of college preparatory level English 3, in addition to the Introduction to Print Journalism class. The course catalog described the freshman course as designed for the advanced student, stressing vocabulary, literature, grammar and writing. Formal literary terminology as well as analysis and personal interpretation will be presented as the student is introduced to quality works in the major genres: short story, novel, drama and poetry. Grammar and vocabulary lessons are derived from the reading component of the course. (St. Albert’s website)

The course catalog stated that the junior English 3 course introduces the student to the themes and ideas prevalent in the development of American literature. The composition component of the course continues the development of the writing skills necessary for all college-bound students. Students will write a research paper. The SAT exercises include vocabulary in context study, critical reading skills and familiarity with the test format. (St. Albert’s website)

Beyond these descriptions, there was no formal scope and sequence, though five years prior to this study the department did develop a list of common, core texts each grade level should teach to avoid overlap (see Appendix A).

Research Participants

Though I focus primarily on my junior English class, this study involved the students in all my core English classes, one section of English 3 (14 students) and two sections of English 1 (43 students). All students were included in my data sources via class discussions, overall class performance, and notes I wrote in my teacher journal. In addition, to analyze the culture of the school, I drew on archival data from a previous
project on the gendered experiences of St. Albert’s faculty conducted in 2008. This project involved focus groups with female faculty members, an anonymous survey of the faculty, to which 52% responded, as well as semi-structured interviews with 22 faculty members spanning seven academic departments, and 1 member of the administration (see Appendix B for protocols). Of those interviewed, 60% were women.

**Participant Recruitment and Informed Consent**

Participant recruitment and informed consent procedures followed the Boston College Human Subject Review process, and the Institutional Review Board granted approval for this study in the fall of 2012. As part of recruiting my students to participate in this project, before the study began, I emailed my students’ parents via the school’s network to inform them that I would be discussing the study with my classes (see Appendix C). I gave parents an overview of the study as well as information regarding the nature of the interviews, the benefits and risks, and a general timeline. I stressed that student participation was completely voluntary. The parental consent form was attached to the email with instructions on how to mail it back to me. I also mailed home the consent form to ensure the form reached those with limited email access or the inability to print the attachment.

Because the research questions were directly related to my classroom, I used class time to present the study to my students and invite them to participate. I was aware that the student-teacher relationship raised the issue of how truly voluntary “volunteer
participation” was. In order to minimize potentially coercive behavior, I followed these procedures:

1. I explained the students’ participation or lack thereof would have no bearing on their grade in the class, nor would it influence their relationship with me. As their classroom teacher, I felt I had developed a rapport and mutual trust with my students, and I hoped this trust encouraged them to believe their participation was truly voluntary and free of consequences.

2. I informed the school principal and my department chair of my study and invited them to attend the class in which I presented the study to my students. Unfortunately, both had schedule conflicts. However, I informed students that they could contact either third party if they felt coerced at any time during the process.

In addition, I informed parents and students of the student’s ability to stop his involvement in the study at any time without any consequence. Both parents and students were afforded the opportunity to ask questions about the study, via email, during class, and after class. I also designated two evening drop-in sessions for parents and students to meet with me at school to ask questions or learn more about the study (no one attended). I encouraged students to discuss the study with their parents so that my students and their parents could consult each other in making the decision about whether I could use the student’s classroom materials for this research. As was explained to them, their participation or lack thereof had no bearing on classroom interactions or
plans. When I received a student’s parental permission forms, I gave the student the assent form to read, ask questions about, and sign before I considered them part of the study. All 14 students in my junior class received parental consent and signed assent forms to participate. One student in each of my freshman classes failed to return his parental consent form, bringing the total student participation rate to 96%, or 55 out of 57 students. Students not participating still completed all of the work, as per usual, but their materials were simply not included in the data sources I analyzed, nor did I interview those students.

**Data Sources and Collection**

Though my research questions stemmed from my long tenure at St. Albert’s, and my teacher journal spanned over seven years, the “systematic, intentional inquiry” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, pp. 23-24) I engaged in for this specific study took place over the course of one academic year. Data collection for this study included many sources typical in case study research because “almost by definition, teacher research is case study: The unit of analysis is typically the individual child, the classroom, or the school” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 59). Since the goal of the study was to investigate how my students and I both constructed gender in our classroom and how the school culture affected those gender constructions, examining what we did in the classroom, what we thought about what we did, and what we were learning were paramount (Freeman, 1998), in addition to understanding how these processes occurred within the larger school culture. Data sources primarily took the form of classroom
observations, written student work, class discussions, individual student interviews, and entries in my teacher journal, as delineated in Table 3.1 below. The sources primarily focused on one unit that particularly highlighted gender issues, but as this research was born from years of my observations and prior gender-related projects at the school that I engaged in as part of my doctoral coursework, I included archival data where necessary, such as earlier teacher journal entries and the aforementioned faculty survey and interviews that predated this study.
Table 3.1. Data Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Data Collection Methods</th>
<th>Frequency/Timeline</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observations of classroom time and general school culture</td>
<td>Teacher journal and field notes</td>
<td>Daily entries covering each class throughout the four-week unit; additional entries as issues or ideas warrant</td>
<td>To capture my thoughts and actions, students’ actions, and a sense of school culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student work</td>
<td>Completed student assignments including writing samples, journal entries, and projects</td>
<td>Daily throughout the unit; other examples of relevant student work as warranted for discussing background information or continued learning (beyond the unit)</td>
<td>To document students’ learning and thoughts on the unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class discussions</td>
<td>Field notes and transcripts of audiotaped conversations</td>
<td>Daily throughout the 5 ½-half week gender unit (18 classes)</td>
<td>To capture my (re)actions &amp; my students’ (re)actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ perceptions on gender, identity, and school culture</td>
<td>Semi-structured student interviews with select focal students (5) and focused class writing prompts</td>
<td>Three interviews per student, one prior to the unit, one during the unit, and one after the unit (12 total)</td>
<td>To document and understand students’ thoughts on gender, identity, and classroom and school culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom routines and policies</td>
<td>Classroom documents (syllabi, lesson plans, photos of whiteboard, relevant postings on class website, handouts)</td>
<td>Daily throughout the unit; earlier documents, such as the course syllabus, as necessary</td>
<td>To record the procedure directing the classroom culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School artifacts and archival data</td>
<td>Prior teacher interviews, historical school documents, prior teacher journal entries (kept since 2008)</td>
<td>Archival data retrieved and relied on as study warrants</td>
<td>To understand school culture, how faculty and administrators experience and shape the culture, and how that culture may have changed over time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations

Yin (2009) notes that research taking place in a natural setting like the classroom offers opportunities for direct observations. In this study, my observational notes came
from the perspective of a participant-observer since I am not an outside, passive observer. This positionality provides unique advantages, as I noted earlier when discussing teacher research. As Yin (2009) observes, such a positionality offers “the ability to perceive reality from the viewpoint of someone ‘inside’ the case study rather than external to it…[which] is invaluable in producing an ‘accurate’ portrayal” (p. 112). I recorded my observations through field notes in my teacher journal. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) explain, “journals intermingle description, record keeping, commentary, and analysis…and capture the immediacy of teaching” (p. 26). I wrote these journal entries daily throughout the unit focusing on gender issues, adding more entries as pertinent issues arose.

**Student Work**

Throughout the unit, I made copies of all written student work, including reader response journal entries, quizzes, and longer paper assignments. In my class, students wrote daily, so this collection was extensive. These writing assignments reflected my students’ opinions about the issues brought up in class and in the texts and were valuable windows into their thought processes. These assignments included personal narratives, responses to short articles and writing prompts, and an analytical paper. In addition, copies of these assignments recorded my feedback on their writing, which was helpful in analyzing my role in how my students worked through these issues. I offer more detail about these assignments and the students’ work in Chapter 5.
Class Discussions

To capture how the students and I interacted and created the classroom culture, I audiotaped class discussions in my junior class in addition to recording my notes about all my classes in my teacher journal. Erickson (1986) notes, “Recording of naturally occurring interaction in events does not substitute for firsthand participant observation and recording by means of fieldnotes. Still, such recordings, subjected to systematic analysis, can provide a valuable additional data source in fieldwork research” (p. 144). Erickson acknowledges that one strength of such recordings is the “capacity for completeness of analysis” (p. 145) because the researcher can replay the material for different analytic purposes. Another benefit is “the potential to reduce the dependence of the observer on primitive analytic typification” (p. 45) because the researcher is not restricted by the limits of real time interpretive inferences, which can sometimes be faulty. A final advantage is that audiotaping “reduces the dependence of the observer on frequently occurring events as the best sources of data” (p. 145), thus enabling her or him to narrow in on rare events that might be lost on a participant observer. Indeed, there were instances when listening to the recordings that I heard things I had not picked up on during the class, and therefore did not initially include in my teacher journal. Erickson (1986) also identifies two limitations of audio recording: replaying a tape only allows an analyst to interact with it vicariously, and an audio recording is devoid of contextual information. However, my insider, teacher researcher role assuages these drawbacks.
I recorded 15 class discussions out of the 18 English 3 class meetings throughout the unit I designed (one recording failed, another class that met first period had such limited attendance due to inclement weather that I changed our class plans and we did not have the discussion we planned, and another class was library work for their literary analysis), resulting in almost 10 hours of taped dialogue. I transcribed the taped discussions for analysis.

**Student Interviews**

While the writing assignments and class discussions offered two avenues to students’ thinking about gender and identity, “one of the most important sources of case study information is the interview” (Yin, 2009, p. 196). I used purposeful sampling to select students in my junior English class for interviews before, during, and after the gender unit (see Appendix D). Patton (2002) explains,

> The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting *information-rich* cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term *purposeful* sampling. (p. 230; emphasis in original)

Because I wanted to study students’ constructions of gender, I used what I knew about students’ backgrounds and classroom performance (both behavior and achievement) to select those I believed to embody some of the different masculinities Connell (2005) proposed. Since the unit I focused on started in January, I had four months to get to know my students and assess where they might best fit in Connell’s model of multiple masculinities (acknowledging, as I noted earlier, that masculinity is fluid and therefore men often occupy more than one masculinity at a time). When I had to choose between
similar students, I aimed for diversity in regard to race, class, and ethnicity, and I also tried to select students with compatible free periods or the ability to come before or after school to better allow us time for the interview. I selected five students to interview about their gendered backgrounds and the relevant topics the class raised, as well as their writing and classwork. I recorded the interviews and had them transcribed, and at the end of the study, I had conducted 15 total interviews that ranged in length from twenty minutes to almost an hour (they got progressively longer), resulting in 8 ½ hours of audio taped interviews. One of the five students had the flu and was absent for several class periods, so while he made up all of his work, because he missed so many of our class discussions, I chose not to include him when discussing my focal students in Chapter 5, though excerpts from his interviews are included elsewhere in this study.

**Classroom Documents**

During the unit, I made extra copies of the course syllabus, handouts, lesson plans, and assignment sheets. I also photographed the SmartBoard at the end of class to capture class notes and board work. These documents served as a record of the class schedule and procedures, which helped to triangulate the data in my teacher journal and class discussions. Additionally, these documents provided insight into my teacher role, including how I communicated information about the unit and made my expectations for my students known.
School Artifacts and Archival Data

School documents were vital to understanding the larger culture in which my classroom was situated. In addition to a book published to commemorate the school’s 100th anniversary (Larrabee, 2007), I included copies of our school yearbook and faculty and student handbooks in my collection of school artifacts. In addition, as noted earlier, I drew from archival data where warranted. This data include an anonymous faculty survey, prior interviews I conducted with teachers on gender issues at St. Albert’s, and earlier entries from my teacher journal, which I have kept since 2006.

Data Triangulation

As I have detailed, this research study relies on several varied data sources meant to add different perspectives that address my research questions. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) note,

Qualitative research is inherently multimethod in focus (Flick, 1998, p. 229). However, the use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. Objective reality can never be captured….Triangulation is not a tool or a strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation (Flick, 1998, p. 230). The combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry (see Flick, 1998, p. 231).

The multiple data sources and methods in this study will allow for two types of triangulation of the data, data triangulation because it makes use of several sources of data, and methodological triangulation because it uses multiple ways to collect data (Freeman, 1998). Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002) state, “the use of multiple
sources of data collection as a form of triangulation prevent[s] reliance exclusively on a single data collection method and thus neutralize[s] any bias inherent in a particular data source” (p. 33). Creswell (2002) adds,

This ensures that the study will be accurate because the information is not drawn from a single source, individual, or process of data collection. In this way, it encourages the research to develop a report that is both accurate and credible. (p. 280)

Table 3.2 below displays how I attempted to “neutralize any bias inherent” to any one source by using multiple sources to answer each research question.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Student Work</th>
<th>Class Discussions</th>
<th>Student Interviews</th>
<th>Classroom Documents</th>
<th>School Artifacts &amp; Archival Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>How was gender constructed in the context of an English course at an all-boys Catholic secondary school?</em></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>As the classroom teacher, what role did I play in the construction of gender in my classroom via my pedagogy, and interactions and relationships with my students?</em></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>How did students construct gender?</em></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>How did the school culture shape the ways my students and I constructed gender?</em></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

This study operated from a theoretical framework that acknowledged multiple masculinities and femininities with the belief that we must learn about and understand these and how they interact in order to create a more just gender order. This is particularly difficult work in a single-sex institution where my male students’ interactions with females are limited, at least during the school day, so the gender unit I created and describe in Chapter 5 helped me study these interactions and gender perspectives. In order to address my research questions, I focused on four units of analysis: the school, myself, my students, and me and my students together as a classroom unit.

I analyzed the data using a case study approach. As my study was particularly text-rich, I used a framework for data analysis that loosely incorporated elements of what Johnston (1995) called “micro-discourse” frame analysis that acknowledges not only what is said (or written) but also what is left unsaid, what Mazzei (2007a) deem the “inhabited silence,” or the absent presence. Johnston (1995) asserts that micro-discourse analysis is “a more intensive approach that takes a specific example of written text or bounded speech and seeks to explain why the words, sentences, and concepts are put together the way they are” (p. 219). This method of analysis considers all sources of meaning, both what is “left implicit in a text, and all that is taken for granted in its interpretation” (p. 220). Johnston (1995) outlines five key constructs for using micro-discourse analysis: 1) Text as a holistic construct; 2) The speech situation; 3) Role analysis; 4) Pragmatic intent; and 5) Discursive cues. Johnston acknowledges that the
five principles apply to micro-discourse analysis in varying ways according to the goals of the research and that the work is so intensive it ought not be applied to all documents or narratives, only selected data. Mazzei’s (2007) concept of “inhabited silence” framework helped with this micro-discourse analysis, as she offers suggestions not only for how to interpret silence (what is left unsaid and unwritten) but also how researchers can become comfortable with it and even welcome it with our research subjects. Her work applies this concept to race, but “inhabited silence” certainly surrounds gender issues as well.

I employed these principles when analyzing my teacher journal, my students’ writings and my feedback, and the transcripts of particularly relevant class discussions. I relied on typical qualitative data analysis methods to interpret my data guided generally by Yin’s (2009) suggested strategies: relying on theoretical propositions, developing a case description, using both qualitative and quantitative data, and examining rival explanations. I developed codes guided by the theoretical frameworks I outlined earlier. Applying these codes to my data was an ongoing process that occurred in conjunction with data collection, and I reread my data and revisited my codes throughout the data collection process. As I reread data, I did so in different ways, such as reading the data chronologically, topically, and by data type, fine-tuning my coding in the process. Such rereading and recoding helped me organize themes and contribute to developing a case description with my classroom as the primary “case” influenced by the larger case of St.
Albert’s as well as the cases of individual students and myself, as demonstrated by Figure 3.2.

*Figure 3.2. Nested case study design.*

Just as qualitative researchers employ multiple methods of data collection, they also deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices, hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand. It is understood, however, that each practice makes the world visible in a different way. Hence there is frequently a commitment to using more than one interpretive practice in any study. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 5)

Unfortunately, qualitative researchers often do not share details about the “interpretive practices” they engage in that lead them to their findings, a problem that opens such work
up to just criticism of trustworthiness (see, e.g. Anfara et al., 2002; Erickson, 1986).

Here, I answer Anfara et al.’s (2002) call for “the public disclosure of processes” (p. 29) “to deal with the ‘science of the art’ of qualitative research” (p. 30) by attempting to make my data analysis processes as transparent as possible.

**Data Analysis as a Recursive, Spiraling Process**

Creswell (2013) explains that in all research, the data collection, analyses, and writing are interrelated processes rather than distinct steps. He notes,

> Qualitative researchers often “learn by doing” (Dey, 1993, p. 6) data analysis. This leads critics to claim that qualitative research is largely intuitive, soft, and relativistic or that qualitative data analysts fall back on the three “I’s” – “insight, intuition, and impression” (Dey, 1995, p. 78). Undeniably, qualitative researchers preserve the unusual and serendipitous, and writers craft studies differently, using analytic procedures that often evolve while they are in the field. (p. 182)

Creswell says that despite the uniqueness of qualitative work, the analysis process is typically analogous to a spiral rather than a linear approach, making data analysis a recursive and multi-layered process that decontextualizes data to sort and code it and recontextualizes data to make meaning from it (Ayres, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003).

The data analysis process I followed involved multiple steps, some conducted simultaneously. The first step in my process actually occurred during the data collection. As noted earlier, I wrote daily in my teacher journal to record my observations. I assessed student work as assignments were completed. I replayed class recordings to generate interview questions for my focal students. With each of these actions, I reviewed specific data to inform how to proceed with my teaching, the class, and individual students – in essence, the study. The notes I took during these “data revisits”
were for my own purposes as a teacher, but they also illuminated patterns and themes with the data that became more prominent during later stages of the data analysis process.

For instance, when playing back one of my class discussions, I noted,

I am aware of my stance in the room. I tend to gravitate toward the left of the room, closer to where my desk [and the recording] is. Yet the right of the room is quieter and more thoughtful, in many ways, in their responses. Why do I gravitate to the students who are often off-topic and like to bring the class down diversions? And why do I let them? These boys are also more inclined to flirt with me.

I wrote this note, an observation of my own physical stance in the room, as a reminder for future classes to be cognizant of how I occupied the classroom space and how that positioning perhaps encouraged certain members of the class to speak and others to remain reticent (and not the students I wanted in either case). As Herr and Anderson (2005) put it, I was engaged in initial meaning making at this stage, even though that was not my primary purpose. Revisiting the data later for deeper understanding revealed this initial meaning making was more than “just” teacher notes. Embedded in this observation, for instance, is also an example of what I later noticed was a troubling pattern of interaction between me and my students.

After I finished the data collection process and transcription was completed, I reread and listened to the data four ways. First, I read the data sources chronologically, taking notes in the margins of the text and creating a list of repeated phrases and ideas and potential themes. Second, I read the corpus of data by source (all classroom discussions, my teacher journal, student interviews, etc.), adding to the notes I took during the first read. Third, I read the data by “case,” treating as separate cases St.
Albert’s, my classroom, each focal student, and myself. Ayres et al. (2003) explained, “This strategy of moving between across- and within-case comparisons facilitated the process of intuiting. Intuiting is the critical reflection on and identification of themes as they are found in the accounts of the multiple respondents” (p. 875). Again, I added to the notes. In this phase, an outside perspective was crucial, as I worried that my intimate knowledge of the participants and the site skewed my reading of the data. Therefore, my dissertation advisor also read transcripts and noted what she saw, and together we identified themes that ultimately led to my codes.

At this point, following a suggestion from one of the case studies highlighted in Ayres et al. (2003), I engaged in guided free writing about each case, the final phase of intuiting, and responded to the general question, “What does this case tell us about gender construction?” Before writing, I reread Schippers’s (2007) suggested questions for studying gender construction and treated them as sub-questions for my free writes: “1) What characteristics or practices are understood as manly in the setting? 2) What characteristics or practices are womanly? 3) Of those practices and characteristics, which situate femininity as complementary and inferior to masculinity?” (p. 100). My guided free writes about each case helped me see themes more clearly.

Finally, with the notes I had generated throughout the earlier readings, I read the data again looking for specific themes or categories, such as “Silence,” “Perceptions about Others,” “Brotherhood,” “Sex/Gender Talk,” “Multiple Masculinities,” “Femininities,” and “Sports.” Many of these categories had subtopics. For instance,
under the category “Silence,” I noted subcategories for who (i.e., “Young female teacher,” or “Veteran teachers”) and what was silenced (i.e., “Female faculty – male student relationships,” or “Reasons for single-sex education”) and possible reasons a topic was silenced (i.e., “Fear?” or “Obliviousness?”). I had similar category breakdowns for “Perceptions about Others,” noting who was othered (i.e., “Women”) who was othering (i.e., “Women”), and why the person or group might have been othered (i.e., “School pride”). Once I established these categories and sub-categories, I again reread the data several times to develop a coding dictionary (see Appendix E), whose utility I tested on random data sources. Ayres et al. (2003) argue,

The use of coding and sorting and the identification of themes are “an important, even an indispensable, part of the [qualitative] research process” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996), but they are not an end in themselves. Coding works well to capture the commonalities of experience across cases but less well to capture the individual uniqueness within cases. (p. 873)

Here, again, was where my insider perspective was helpful. When I felt the “individual uniqueness” of a case was getting lost, I added to and revised the codes to ensure a more representative match. Likewise, I reduced the number of codes by eliminating those used less frequently.

A comprehensive coding dictionary does not an argument make, however. Ayres et al. (2003) cite Richards’s (1998) term of “garden path analysis” to describe when researchers present an exhaustive list of themes that were found in the data, but the themes are self-contained and unrelated … the list of themes alone has little practical value. Until these themes are reintegrated in a manner that shows how they work together in an actual (or constructed) case, the analysis is incomplete. (p. 881)
The next step in the data analysis process, then, is to reconstruct the coded data to “present the reader with the stories identified throughout the analytical process, the salient themes, recurring language, and patterns of beliefs linking people and settings together” (Anfara et al., 2002, p. 31). I did this by applying the codes to the data set and incorporating Erickson’s (1986) concept of the evidentiary warrant while mapping patterns. Erickson says that researchers need to test the validity of their assertions with confirming and disconfirming evidence. To conceptualize this process, he offers a metaphor of the entire data set in a cardboard box filled with the items of data on pieces of paper. It is the researcher’s job to string these data papers together and then pay attention to those strings of data that have the largest number of subsidiary strings attached. Erickson (1986) explains, “The strongest assertions are those that have the most strings attached to them, across the widest possible range of sources and kinds of data” (p. 148).

I did not string data papers together, nor did I count actual frequencies of codes; instead, I made index cards with key data sources coded (often a particular quote from a student or faculty interview, or a certain entry in my teacher journal) and organized and reorganized them until I noticed certain patterns gaining more weight (in this case, cards). For instance, all of the students I interviewed talked about the notion of brotherhood, so I coded excerpts of their interviews using one or more of the codes I generated for “brotherhood” and put them on cards. It was not until I had these cards in front of me that I noticed the significance the students placed on brotherhood and how it influenced
their (inter)actions that I was able to develop a sub-assertion that ultimately informed the main argument I make in the next chapter. While some assertions held more weight than others, taken holistically, they added up to a well-rounded and well-supported argument. At the start of Chapters 4, 5, and 6, I present my arguments using figures to display Erickson’s model of the evidentiary warrant.

**Reporting the Findings**

Before the next three chapters where I discuss my findings, I want to clarify the language I use to communicate how representative they are. Earlier, I noted that I used archival data that included interviews with 22 faculty members and 1 member of the administration, and an anonymous survey to which 52% of the faculty responded. In addition, notes in my teacher journal include excerpts of dialogue with additional faculty and students as I remembered it and reflected on it, often on the day it occurred. Finally, one of my data sources for Chapter 4 on the culture of the school includes a “Diversity & Inclusion Report,” which was based on an independent consultant’s school-wide survey sent to faculty, staff, trustees, and students a few weeks before I conducted the study in my classroom. Just over 80% of faculty responded and over 50% of students responded to the survey, which included 20-25 items, depending on their classification, including open-ended responses. Therefore, when I use the words “most” or “many,” I am referring to any sentiment that over half of the respondents shared (i.e., over 11 of my faculty/administrator interview subjects, over half of the survey respondents, or over half of the students in my classroom). I use the words “some” or “about half” when I refer to
thoughts that 35-55% of participants communicated, the words “a small number” when referring to 25-35% of respondents, and “a few” when referring to 15-25%. Otherwise, I refer to an exact number of participants, or I reference particular respondents using their pseudonym. While I recognize that over half of my respondents is not the same as over half the entire faculty and student population, my insider positionality in addition to regular member checks with school community members makes me comfortable with this language and the findings’ representation.
Chapter Four
“For the boys”: Silence, Othering, and Brotherhood

Chris (student): You might have heard that “For the boys.” You ever hear that – “FTB” or something like that?

Ms. McEachern: No.

Chris: No? Okay…well that’s kind of uncomfortable. Haha.

Ms. McEachern: No, but what does that mean?

Chris: It’s like, “For the boys.” Whatever you do, if you do something for your friends, around here anyway, it’s for the boys.

In the previous chapter on research design and methodology, I offered a brief history of St. Albert’s school, particularly its roots in the Xaverian Brothers tradition. In discussing my classroom as a research site, I also explained how my English classes fit into the curriculum requirements for St. Albert’s students. In order to fully understand how my students and I constructed gender inside our English classroom, I needed to first look at the larger culture of the school and how gender was constructed at the institutional level. Here, I provide an analysis of the world of St. Albert’s to give context for both the gender unit I designed for my class and describe in more detail in Chapter 5, as well as the findings about my teaching and myself as a teacher researcher, which I explain in Chapter 6. The analysis of the data that I described in Chapter 3 revealed three salient themes that I introduce here and return to in Chapters 5 and 6. Through analyzing the school artifacts and archival data I referred to in Chapter 3, in addition to journal entries that discuss school culture, the main argument I make here is that despite stated goals of inclusivity, acceptance, and caring for the whole person, the culture of St.
Albert’s also fostered exclusivity and reinforced stereotypical gender norms that ultimately limited its community members. In this way, the school created a “brotherhood” that was ostensibly inclusive of the school community and bonded its members, but in actuality, not all of the population subscribed to the concept.

I developed this argument based on what Erickson (1986) called the “evidentiary warrant” for qualitative research. As Figure 4.1 indicates, three sub-assertions, each of which is substantiated by multiple data sources, support this main argument:

1. The school community “silenced” dissenting voices explicitly by not giving dissenting voices prominent positions of power, as well as implicitly by not acknowledging alternative viewpoints, helping to maintain a culture of silence in which community members censored themselves.

2. Students and faculty “othered” groups that did not fit what the students and faculty implicitly believed to be the school’s “preferred” student (White, smart, heterosexual boy from a high socioeconomic status) and/or the school's “preferred” faculty member (White, heterosexual male wholly supportive of the school’s administration and initiatives).

3. Community members, particularly students, subscribed to the idea of a school “brotherhood” and did what(ever) they could to gain membership in that fraternity, including engaging in silence and othering, which perpetuated the cycle.
Unfortunately, this process alienated some community members, particularly those in marginalized groups.

I present the evidence for these sub-assertions in different ways. To detail how the community engaged in silence, I draw on a particular campus event and its aftermath, as well as the school community’s reactions to both. In elaborating on how students and faculty engaged in “othering,” I highlight particular discourse examples that demonstrate the various forms of othering that occurred. Finally, to discuss the larger concept of “brotherhood” and how silence and othering both contributed to it and resulted from it, I combined the earlier approaches and use both a vignette and separate discourse examples.
Figure 4.1. Chapter 4’s main argument, sub-assertions, and supporting evidence

Main Argument:
Despite stated goals of inclusivity, acceptance, and caring for the whole person, the larger culture of St. Albert’s also fostered exclusivity and reinforced stereotypical gender norms that ultimately limited its community members. In this way, the school created a “brotherhood” that was ostensibly inclusive of the school community and bonded its members, but in actuality, only some of the population felt it applied to them.

Sub-assertion 1: The school community “silenced” dissenting voices explicitly by not giving dissenting voices prominent positions of power, as well as implicitly by not acknowledging alternative viewpoints, helping to maintain a culture of silence in which community members censored themselves.

Sub-assertion 2: Students and faculty “othered” groups that did not fit what the students and faculty implicitly believed to be the school’s “preferred” student (White, smart, heterosexual boy from a high socioeconomic status) and/or the school’s “preferred” faculty member (White, heterosexual male wholly supportive of the school’s administration and initiatives).

Sub-assertion 3: Community members, particularly students, subscribed to the idea of a school “brotherhood” and did what(ever) they could to gain membership in that fraternity, including engaging in silence and othering, which perpetuated the cycle.

Primary Data Sources and Codes:
- Curriculum guides (Sh-WOM, Sh-LGBTQ, Sh-SO, Sh-RACE)
- Faculty interviews (Sh-WOM, Sh-YFT, Sh-VF, Sh-Adm)
- Gender composition of school governance (Sh-WOM, Sh-RACE)
- Diversity & Inclusion report (Sh-LGBTQ)
- Fieldnotes (Sh-POS, Sh-PRIS, Sh-VS, Sh-1S, Sh-PRES)

Primary Data Sources and Codes:
- All student interviews (Ot-Wom, Ot-Pub, Ot-LGBTQ, Ot-Low Ot-00, Ot-DO, Ot-10)
- Teacher journal (Ot-Wom, Ot-Pub, Ot-LGBTQ, Ot-00, Ot-DO)
- Faculty interviews (Ot-Wom, Ot-Low Ot-00, Ot-DO, Ot-10)

Primary Data Sources and Codes:
- All student interviews (Bro-Hist, Bro-Fav, Bro-Rej)
- Fieldnotes (Bro-Hist, Bro-Fav, Bro-Rej, Bro-Exc)

St. Albert’s Stated Mission: Care of the Whole Person

Sitting atop the most prominent building on campus, the spire bell tolled, signaling the 9 o’clock hour and the start of the six-minute passing time for students to get to their next class. Anyone who stood near the flagpole just below the spire had a good view of the idyllic, 175-acre grounds that could pass as the setting for a New England college. As the students started to pass by, observers might actually have
wondered if they were on the set of the 1989 film, *Dead Poets Society*, though the modern haircuts and lack of formal uniforms would have suggested otherwise.

In the 2013-2014 school year, St. Albert’s, a 107-year old, all-boys Catholic high school sponsored by the Xaverian Brothers, prided itself on its traditional, rigorous college prep curriculum, with 21 Advanced Placement courses, wireless technology, and SmartBoards in every classroom. For decades, 99% of the graduating class has attended a 4-year college, and of those, 88% completed college within 4 years, a statistic the headmaster proudly stated is three times higher than the national average. Approximately 1,150 boys called St. Albert’s their school, which cost $19,950 and offered little ethnic or religious diversity (90% of the student body is White and 70% is Catholic). St. Albert’s teaching faculty comprised 102 people, with 61% male, and 91% White. Of the 14-member administration team, six were women, though this female representation was relatively new. Until my hire as an Assistant Principal for Academics for the 2013-2014 school year, St. Albert’s had only had one female administrator in the academic role of headmaster, principal or academic dean, and she served as Assistant Principal for only four years. In 2007, when I started my doctoral studies and began forming the questions that ultimately drove this research study, there was just one female administrator who joined the school as the Dean of Students in 2005. In 2007, she became the Assistant Principal of Student Life, who oversaw Student Council, planned social events, and coordinated the more than 60 student clubs and organizations that comprised the co-curricular program, in which over 90% of students participated.
The comprehensive extra-curricular component, combined with St. Albert’s extensive campus ministry and athletic offerings, gave credence to the school’s mission statement and its focus on caring for the whole student. The mission statement attracted many parents, students, and faculty members to join its community, as it did me. Beside the door inside every classroom was a small, simple frame encasing the school’s beliefs:

St. Albert’s School, a Catholic, Xaverian Brothers sponsored secondary school for young men, is committed to educating the whole person. Our rigorous academic and extensive co-curricular program encourages students to develop their spiritual, intellectual, moral, physical, and creative potential, and inspires them to honor the diversity that enriches both our school community and the world beyond St. Albert’s. We challenge our young men to grow in faith and wisdom, to promote human dignity, to act with compassion and integrity, to pursue justice and peace, and to live lives of service to society.

The list of St. Albert’s club and activity offerings, which included the Anime Club, the Greek & Latin Club, and an a cappella singing group (see Appendix F for complete list), suggested the school did indeed value students’ “spiritual, intellectual, moral, physical, and creative potential,” even if their interests lied outside the traditional academic or Catholic purview. For instance, on Mondays, students could congregate to share their love of science fiction; on Tuesdays, students could attend “Always Our Brothers and Sisters,” the school’s gay/straight alliance; on Wednesdays, they could participate in the Jewish Student Union; on Thursdays, Amnesty International gathers; and on Fridays, students could celebrate Latin American culture with Latinos Unidos en Acción (L.U.N.A.). During the 2012-2013 school year, St. Albert’s also began to focus on “wellness,” hosting a Wellness Fair with local organizations to educate faculty, staff and students about healthy eating, exercise, and careers in health-related fields. In many
ways, these programmatic options spoke to diversity efforts, and these clubs certainly helped students find like-minded peers with whom they could bond.

In fact, there were many diversity issues St. Albert’s gave attention to, as evidenced not only by the multicultural club offerings, but also by the establishment of a Multicultural Affairs and Community Development office in 2007. It was under this office that the Diversity and Inclusivity Task Force worked in 2012 to assess the diversity climate of the school with the help of an independent consultant. In many ways, the school’s attention to diversity resulted in positive changes, such as a more diverse student population (racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically) than in previous years, as well as regular educative conversations about White privilege. In addition, the school responded to students’ excessive misuse and abuse of the word “retarded” as a pejorative term by designing a large banner banning the “R-Word” and inviting students to sign it. After the signing and hanging of this banner in 2008, the word’s use significantly decreased, and it was rare to hear a student use it in class; if he did, classmates often censured him before a teacher could. Still, the independent consultant’s report in 2013 revealed that the school’s “definition of diversity, while necessary, [was] not sufficiently internalized or operationalized for the St. Albert’s community to leverage diversity as a resource for extraordinary teaching, learning, and leading” (Diversity & Inclusion Report, p. 15), suggesting that while the school had made advancements in some areas, there was still work to be done, as my research confirmed. The school’s diverse activities did not mean their members actually felt included in the larger school community, and this feeling of
exclusion was evident when examining the silence among various constituents about specific topics.

**Silence**

The first sub-assertion I support is that the school community “silenced” dissenting voices explicitly by not giving dissenting voices prominent positions of power, as well as implicitly by not acknowledging alternative viewpoints, helping to maintain a culture of silence in which community members censored themselves. Most participants in this study engaged in practices that subverted St. Albert’s noble mission to tend to “the whole person,” even if only subconsciously, and one of the ways they did this was through silence. As I noted in Chapter 3, paying attention to silences – in the interviews I conducted with teachers and students, in my teaching, in the curriculum – was part of my data analysis because

the study of silence is central to understanding the more elusive aspects of power. Its guiding premise is that silence, while universal in its form as perceived absence, is indicative of repressed, unobtrusive presence and functionally tied to the context. (Achino-Loeb, 2006, p. 2)

Power is a central feature of the theoretical framework I outlined earlier; poststructural feminist theory focuses on understanding existing gender power relations and how these are reproduced or challenged, so considering the role silence plays in these relational dynamics is vital. Further, Connell’s (2000) model of multiple structures of gender includes “power relations,” and “communication relations,” and silence is one key factor that connects both of these structures. As I explained in Chapter 3, when coding my data for silence, I noted both what was silenced and possible reasons why a topic was silenced.
In this chapter, I primarily focus on the *what* because, despite my intimate knowledge of the context and my familiarity and rapport with my subjects, I cannot surmise the motives for other people’s silences unless they stated their reasons explicitly; it was difficult enough to probe the causes for my own silence, which I address in Chapter 6.

It would have been all too easy to identify the silences in the data and claim they meant whatever I wanted them to mean. As Mazzei (2003) warned,

> A real danger in this methodological approach is our forcing the silences to say what we want to hear. It is essential that we listen for the meanings that are present (and absent) and the motivations and sources of those meanings—that we let the silence speak. (p. 367)

One way to let the silence speak is to note the situations where topics might naturally be discussed but yet are never voiced, or situations where silence arises due to censure or self-censure for previously speaking. Mazzei’s classifications of silence prove useful for categorizing silence, and her five categorizations guided my coding.

“Polite silences” address the “hesitancy to speak for fear of offending someone” (Mazzei, 2003, p. 364); in this case, the fear of offending silences someone. “Privileged silences” refer to the silences privileged groups engage in simply because they do not, or are unable to, identify the privileged position they adopt. Mazzei referred to White privilege as an example: “Because as Whites we do not have to attend to difference or because we are able to choose to do so, White privilege remains elusive, unintelligible, and silent” (p. 364). In the institution where this research took place, White privilege certainly existed, but it was actually a topic frequently discussed in classes and professional development meetings, as I noted above. The “privileged silences” at St.
Albert’s occurred around male privilege and heterosexual privilege, as I discuss below. The third categorization of silence is a “veiled silence,” which occurs when a topic is not clearly articulated but rather conveyed in a roundabout way, typically as a reaction to another topic. Mazzei used race to explicate this concept: “The absence of oneself as raced becomes apparent only when seen in opposition to someone else who is other. We are silent or utter a veiled response because we do not know how else to respond” (2003, p. 366). The White teachers with whom she explored the topic of race did not see themselves as raced until they discussed encounters with the Other (in this case, Blacks); in this study, the male faculty members and my students frequently did not see themselves as gendered and often only broached their Maleness in opposition to the Other (females). “Intentional silences” are the fourth type Mazzei described, and these are the silences we engage in out of insecurity or fear of judgment. I also discovered that people engaged in intentional silences out of a perception of futility, whether real or imagined. For instance, teachers and students suggested that they were intentionally silent because they believed speaking up was waste of energy since their audience would not be receptive to what they had to say. The fact that community members acknowledged this type of silence supports my assertion that the act of silencing works to maintain a culture of silence in which community members censor themselves. The final category of silence Mazzei labeled “unintelligible silence.” Mazzei cautioned that while silences always mean something, their meaning is not always discernible. I borrow Mazzei’s explanation when she stated, “It is for this reason that I make no attempt to
understand every silence. Nor can I be so presumptuous as to claim that every silence is intentional, discernable, or knowable” (2003, p. 366).

My analysis revealed two major, related topics of silence: issues of gender relations and sexual orientation. I illustrate both of these silences with a critical incident, described as a vignette constructed from my data, primarily my teacher journal and interviews with faculty.

**Library graffiti.** In the final week of the 2006-2007 school year, a faculty member serving as a substitute proctor for the library\(^\text{13}\) noticed graffiti carved into some of the study carrels that line the sides of the room and reported it to the librarians and principal. Word of the amateur artwork traveled fast, and soon the entire school was aware of the incident. In one of my junior classes at the end of the day, students told me the graffiti had been there “almost the whole school year,” so they didn’t understand why it was “such a big deal now.” No one had ever reported it, and it was the substitute library proctor, apparently more vigilant about the duty than others, who saw it. At first, I assumed the graffiti was of the generic, public-bathroom-stall variety, and we as a school community needed to drive home the point of respecting school property, an issue we had dealt with earlier in the year, apparently unsuccessfully, when we found anti-Semitic messages written in the boys’ bathrooms. It took another day before students and faculty told me the defacements included some drawings and some names of female teachers, all under the age of 35, along with sexually explicit messages about what the

\(^{13}\) Each faculty member is assigned duty periods, one of which is assisting the librarians in proctoring the library and another of which is substitute-on-call. When a teacher has a planned absence, a sub-on-call teacher will fulfill the missing teacher’s duty period.
graffiti artist wanted to do to the women, and what he wanted the women to do to him. Though the messages centered primarily around Sara, an attractive world language teacher, I was also mentioned.

I took their word for it and never ventured to the library to see the graffiti for myself, certain that if I did, students would stare at me with knowing glances. Those who never thought of me in a sexual way before might now look at me with new eyes, and I did not want to draw any attention to myself, as I was having a hard enough time swallowing my disappointment over the realization that, at St. Albert’s, I might never be just a “teacher” but rather always a “female teacher.” Though of course I am a female teacher, at St. Albert’s, this designation seemed like a pejorative distinction:

As Gloria Steinem observed, “Whoever has the power, takes over the noun – and the norm – while the less powerful get an adjective.” Since no one wants to be perceived as less powerful, a lot of women reject the gender identification and insist, “I don’t see myself as a woman; I see myself as a novelist/author/professional/fill-in-the-blank.” They are right to do so. No one wants her achievements modified. (Sandberg, 2013, p. 140)

After this episode, I struggled with my role at the school. I considered myself a good teacher who took the time to design creative, challenging assignments that kept students engaged, but this event made me wonder if I had been deluding myself. All along, had my students considered me a sex object instead of a knowledgeable, hard-working teacher? Of course, in thinking this way, I was committing an either/or fallacy; certainly students could have held both views of me simultaneously. However, it is important to note that I did not think in these terms at my teaching jobs before coming to the single-sex St. Albert’s. At this school, being thought of as a “female teacher” led me to feel like
my achievements in the classroom were modified, and perhaps I was not as good of a teacher as I thought I was, and certainly not as good as the men.

As I wrestled with these thoughts, many male colleagues joked with me that I must feel glad I “made the list” and that I “still got it,” as though having the dual role of teacher/sex symbol was something to which all female teachers aspired. I coded these comments as a veiled silence. They could have asked how I felt about the graffiti. They could have discussed how our school culture might contribute to students committing such an act. They could have wondered how the graffiti went unreported for so long. They could have stated the obvious that male teachers were not the targets of such degrading behavior (in this instance, perhaps their silence was more of a privileged one). They could have questioned what this episode might mean for female teachers at our school. Instead, they acknowledged the gendered incident by not discussing gender or power explicitly, but rather by making light of the situation and trying to turn it into a compliment of sorts that I presumably still had my youth and my looks (regardless of my teaching ability).

I responded to these comments with a grimace and silence, which I coded as an “intentional silence.” My insecurity about my colleagues and my role at the school rendered me speechless. What might have happened had I responded, “I do not need or want validation of my looks from high school boys, nor am I comfortable with my male colleagues thinking such validation is a good thing. Why aren’t you disgusted? Why aren’t you troubled that a student might have gone from your classroom to the library to
write such things? If this is your response, do you think you might have played a role in creating a culture where students think this is okay?” Maybe my colleagues did not know how to handle it and just needed my invitation to engage in a more serious conversation with me, and maybe they would have revealed how bothered they were about the incident. However, I needed to protect myself against the possibility that they were being cavalier about the matter because they considered it par for the course at our school. At the time, I believed it was better for me to keep my thoughts to myself and give my colleagues the benefit of the doubt than to have them confirm what I was thinking – that I would never be seen as a teacher deserving of the same respect afforded my male colleagues at St. Albert’s.

When I did speak to another female colleague about the library graffiti, she acknowledged that the incident was unfortunate but then shrugged her shoulders and said, “Well, at least our boys have good taste in women. Think about it – everyone mentioned is smart, assertive, and no-nonsense. If these are the women they fantasize about…” She trailed off and offered another shrug. This response, too, ended in a silence, and her tone and knowing glance suggested she held her tongue on finishing the sentence not because she was afraid of offending me (a polite silence) or of my judgment (an intentional silence), but because she thought I knew what she meant. Johnston (1995) stated, “In face-to-face interaction, it is common that nonverbal channels of information also convey meaning. These aids to interpretations include inflection, tone, pitch, cadence, melodic contours of speech” (p. 228). In this case, these “nonverbal channels of information”
point to a sixth category of silence that needs to be added to Mazzei’s (2003) catalogue: presumptive silence, an absence that occurs when one presumes the audience knows how to fill it, perhaps because the listener knows the speaker or the context so well. Unlike Mazzei’s unintelligible silence, which is a pause that is difficult to classify because the intent is “unknowable,” a presumptive silence has a clear purpose, though the audience might misunderstand the intent of the one employing it. For instance, in this case, the faculty member assumed I knew what it meant that the students were fantasizing about “smart, assertive, no-nonsense women.” Her tone suggested she thought the students’ “concentration” on these women was positive and healthy, even if the library carrels were not the appropriate forum to relay their imaginations. Was the presumed end to her unfinished sentence, “We shouldn’t be so worried”? Perhaps I misread her nonverbal cues and misunderstood her presumptive silence, but just as it was with my male colleagues, again I engaged in an intentional silence and did not ask her to clarify so that I could allow myself the possibility that I mistook her meaning.

In this incident, my male colleagues, the administrator, and I all relied on silence to help frame this negative event in a positive way. Goffman (1974) contends that frames are presuppositions that confer, articulate, and elaborate meaning. In this case, we do not discuss an event such as the library graffiti as fact but rather present it in the context of a frame. Simply put, framing is an interpretive act by which “participants define how others’ actions and words should be understood” (Oliver & Johnston, 2000, p. 40). My male colleagues, then, tried to define for me (and maybe also for themselves) the
students’ actions and words as a compliment. The female faculty member defined the event as one not so troublesome because it showed that the boys somehow admired smart women. Titus (2004) points out that because contexts are always framed in one way or another, “it is not simply a matter of the situation being interpreted in terms of some frame, but that a framework – in its use and deployment – is reflexively constitutive of, and justification for, a context” (p. 146). Thus, using this framework where the objectification of women is a benign, maybe even somewhat welcome, act, such actions become institutionalized. My silence in response to my coworkers allowed me to frame their actions and words as uncomfortable, half-hearted attempts to give me solace rather than responses that exposed their true feelings about the situation.

To my knowledge, the library vandal was never caught. Though the principal never followed up with me, he met with Sara, the teacher more prominently featured in the graffiti, several times to “check in,” as she told me a year later in an interview.

They basically wanted to cover their asses and see if I was going to sue the school…I told them they needed to seriously consider coeducation. Someone has to acknowledge that the indirect implication to students when you send them to school and girls can’t be there is that there’s something different and there’s a reason to exclude women sometimes and that’s going to lead to all kinds of other assumptions.

One of those outcomes, according to Sara, is that women are easier to objectify. She eventually told school administrators to stop talking to her about it, as it made her more uncomfortable to “talk to them about how the boys talk to each other about [her] body.” They complied. It is worth noting that this situation is one of the few situations recorded in my data sources in which a community member, particularly one with relatively little
power, requested silence. Sara left the school three years later because her husband’s
career was doing well enough that she didn’t “have to put up with this bullshit” any more
and could pursue full-time graduate work instead, as she told me during our joint lunch
duty.

Because this event happened at the end of the school year, we simply did not have
time as a school community to devote much attention to the incident and its larger
implications. I documented the school’s more immediate, public response in my journal:

The administration acted admirably. We were encouraged to bring the issue up in
our classes in whatever way we felt comfortable, but how can a female teacher,
particularly someone mentioned in the pornographic graffiti, address this issue
with male students? How can any female address it without sounding like a
feminist? And is sounding like a feminist bad? What does it mean to leave it up
to the male teachers to have these conversations with our boys (as the majority of
the female faculty wanted to do)? How much of this “old boys club” mentality is
par for the course at an all-boys school? How much responsibility does the
administration hold for changing it?

St. Albert’s ended every school year with a school-wide closing liturgy. At the end of the
year of the graffiti incident, two older, female faculty members (not mentioned in the
graffiti) wrote and read a reflection about sexism and the role of women at our school,
ending with a call for action:

Georgia: You enter this school as boys and will leave as young men. And one of
our core values at St. Albert’s is to recognize what effects our actions have on
others – for becoming a man means developing a respect for the dignity of all
people – including and especially for the dignity of women.
Molly: We can model that value in our everyday lives here on this campus –
beginning today –

Georgia: We stand up for you every day at St. Albert’s.

Molly and Georgia: Will you stand up for us? Will you stand up with us?

There was an awkward pause, but then male faculty members started applauding and rising from their seats, and the students followed, a testament to the power male faculty members have in influencing the student body. After the applause ended, students were released for the summer, and the school community was left wondering how the incident would be revisited, if at all, when students came back to campus in September.

As the following school year began, the library carrels had been replaced, and the administration reminded proctors of the need to be vigilant in their supervision. In addition, students were required to submit their student IDs in exchange for a card giving them permission to sit in a specific numbered carrel. This protocol was a formality only, however, as there was no formal system of tracking who sat where and when, nor was the area inspected before a student could receive his card back after using the space. For faculty, the issue of gender and its role at the school was the focus of professional development sessions for the following school year. What was surprising, though, was that despite the incident that prompted this focus, the professional development conversation was framed around the relationship between male/female colleagues with no mention of the students at all, nor was there any suggested carry over to the classroom. These meetings, as well as my interviews with faculty members that school year,
revealed that most female faculty members did not feel they had a “voice” at St. Albert’s.

As I recorded in my teacher journal:

Women felt the male teachers were perpetuating gender stereotypes, encouraging misogynistic behavior, and adding fuel to the fire when they addressed the boys [derogatorily] as “ladies,” or failed to squelch students’ stories of what they did with their girlfriends the night before, or did not reprimand students when they referred to a female teacher as a “bitch.” [The women thought that] allowing boys to say or do things in a male-taught class that would not be permissible in a female-taught class somehow contributed to the general lack of respect females have on campus.

Likewise, when I met with groups of female faculty members after the professional development sessions, they all said they felt dismissed, with some stating they often asked themselves the question, “Am I invisible?” when faced with sexist comments. One teacher mentioned that she had her students “close their eyes and imagine a female professor with girls sitting next to them in class” when she heard sexist comments as a way to get them to think about the impact of their words and how they might be perceived in a future co-ed college course. The women in the groups lamented the lack of a female speaker presence at student assemblies, commencement, and the annual Ryken Award,14 pointing out that if the students never saw women in these key presentations, it reinforced the message that they can be discounted because they are not smart, capable, or important enough to be at the helm. When the 2007-2008 school year ended, the professional development sessions ceased, and I have not heard anyone mention those professional development sessions or the “library incident” again except in

14 The senior class selects a faculty member to serve as commencement speaker, and the faculty and staff nominate an adult member of the community for the Ryken award every year. Since 1993, the earliest year for which we have records, only 4 of the 21 award winners have been women.
my interviews with Sara and Molly (one of the women who spoke at the end of the year liturgy) in the spring of 2008.

Given the school’s response to the graffiti incident, this example may seem like an odd one to illustrate silencing. After all, the administration encouraged teachers to discuss the incident with their students as they felt comfortable and followed up with the one teacher most frequently named. They took action to rid the library of the graffiti and put policies in place to ensure such vandalism did not happen again, and faculty and staff participated in professional development sessions on gender in the workplace.

However, Mazzei’s (2003, 2004, 2007a, 2007b, 2008) work on White teachers’ silence about race is important here because it illustrates that even when people “talk,” there is much they do not say, and it is important to pay attention to those absences. She observed:

> What slowly emerged as I gained intimacy with these conversations was the realization that the acts of avoidance, denial, deflection, reframing, and intellectualizing that were prevalent in their interactions and in their response to my questions was indeed neither inaction nor passivity but rather a silence that was speaking without speaking. (Mazzei, 2003, p. 363)

Although we as a school talked about the sexist graffiti incident, we engaged in “acts of avoidance, denial, deflection, reframing, and intellectualizing.” For instance, the principal followed up with Sara, and in an email sent to faculty, he encouraged anyone to come speak to him about the incident. This outreach attempted to ease the emotional charge, but in focusing on the faculty’s wellbeing, the administration avoided other issues, namely why a student (or students) would publicly and permanently objectify his
young, female teachers in the first place and why the graffiti went unreported when other
students had seen it for “almost the whole school year.” Perhaps St. Albert’s sensed a
problem within the school’s culture, and this was the impetus for having professional
development sessions on the topic of gender relations the following school year, but as I
recorded in my journal, in these sessions, even when female faculty pointed out specific
sexist behavior they saw male faculty engaging in, the men denied it and expressed
outrage at their nameless, faceless male colleagues who might be the perpetrators (a type
of othering that I discuss in the next section).

By focusing on male – female faculty relationships in these professional
development sessions, St. Albert’s was deflecting attention from the student body and
reframing the incident as one that stemmed from faculty relationships. In one session I
attended, the faculty were confused as to why the meeting was taking place, and the
women even said the sexism they had faced on campus involved the students more than
their male colleagues. One could argue that the administration’s purpose for
concentrating on faculty interactions was due to male teachers modeling inappropriate
behavior, enabling institutionalized sexism. However, if this was their reasoning, it was
not explicitly stated. To my knowledge, at no point in these post-incident conversations
did anyone question out loud how the single-sex aspect of the school might privilege men
and male students over women and female faculty members, aside from Sara’s comment
to the administration. At no point did anyone publicly question what we were doing as a
school to educate the students about healthy gender relationships in the absence of female
peers. In keeping silent about these important topics, we were talking about sexism and gender relations without truly acknowledging the elephant in the room.

At the start of this section on silence, I noted that “silence is central to understanding the more elusive aspects of power” (Achino-Loeb, 2006, p. 2) and that power is central to the poststructural feminist theoretical framework that guided this study. As Achino-Loeb (2006) argues,

If we want to understand how power works, we must look at the interstitial spaces where meaning is ambiguous… We must look at the spaces of withheld judgment, of deferred opinion, of incipient if timid understanding just as much as we look at the well-defined spaces of prohibition, of censorship, of squelching of perspective. For this is the way in which power works unobtrusively. (p. 16)

Silences are those “interstitial spaces where meaning is ambiguous,” at least on the surface. In my analysis, I have made meaning from those silences in the data sources.

The silences in the interstitial spaces where Connell’s (2000) four structures of gender, discussed in Chapter 2, intertwine offer other places to look at how power operates at St. Albert’s. As noted earlier, Connell’s structure of labor relations invites such questions as, Who does what? How is this division decided? What are the economic consequences of these decisions? The power relations structure asks, Who is in charge of whom? Who controls the resources? How is this authority asserted? The questions the structure of emotional relations prompt are, Who or what do we desire? How do we fulfill our desires? How do our desires shape our interactions? And, finally, the communication relations structure asks, What symbolic linguistic practices do we engage in? How do others resist or engage in these practices with us? All of these structures
come into play when considering the library graffiti incident and how it reflects the larger
school culture.

The labor relations structure at St. Albert’s highlighted the lack of women in
positions of power. As noted earlier, 39% of the faculty were women, and this gender
breakdown was reflected among the department chairs (three out of the nine academic
departments are headed by women), but it was not reflected in the administrative team at
the time of this study, nor was it mirrored in those chosen to address the school in
honored positions, such as the annual Ryken Award, faculty commencement speaker, or
speakers for assemblies, as the female faculty members I interviewed mentioned. Their
absence in these roles resulted in a silence that helped privilege men and breed disrespect
for women among the students and allowed them to see women as “less than.” Such
contempt was not only visible in the graffiti incident but also in insidious ways. In a
survey of the faculty, one respondent commented,

The administration refuses to see that preferential treatment is given to male
administrators and that they “cover” for each other. If a male member of the
faculty is near retirement age, he is very likely to find ways to extend his income
earning years. If a male is not successful in his administrative role, he will be
moved to another administrative position (sometimes even for a position that
never existed before!). The administration tends to hire other male administrators
of similar background & training, yet we continue to trumpet “diversity.”

One faculty member, Carol, told me that when students’ schedules listed all female
teachers, the school used to allow them to switch into a male teacher’s class when
normally St. Albert’s did not make lateral schedule changes to honor requests for specific
teachers. Students could initiate such a change with their school counselor, and the
Assistant Principal for Academics would need to sign off on the change. Interestingly, as Carol pointed out, the opposite apparently did not occur when a student’s schedule listed all men, presumably because students did not bring up the issue. Likewise, when both a man and a woman taught the same elective, students often did not want the female teacher. Katherine, who taught one section of a science elective and had done so for over a decade, said that students often questioned her qualifications to teach the course; yet, the male colleague who taught the other section of the elective, and who had been at the school for only a few years, did not have to field such questions about his background. Maeve, a relatively young teacher who graduated from an Ivy League school, said that when she wore her alma mater’s sweatshirt on “dress down” days, students asked her to “prove” that she actually matriculated there. The institutional silence around gender relations, perpetuated by the lack of women (and, for that matter, the marginalized or subordinate men, as Connell (2000) labels them) in leadership roles, resulted in these less public acts of discrimination that went on behind classroom doors, the one place at St. Albert’s where females were sometimes in charge of males.

At St. Albert’s, the power relations structure was closely related to the labor relations structure in that, by and large, men were in charge of women. Though the school had three female department heads, the way labor and power were structured, department chairs acted more as liaisons between the faculty and administrative team rather than as authority figures in their own right. For instance, department chairs were involved in hiring and contract renewal conversations, but they did not have the ultimate
say. Likewise, while they might have observed their department faculty’s classrooms, their observation reports were non-evaluative and did not result in personnel decisions; such judgments ultimately came from the principal, informed by the leadership team.

Two particular situations are worth further discussion with regard to power relations and silence, however: classrooms with female teachers, where women were in charge of young men; and Sara’s using her “victim” status to assert power over the administration in requesting their silence (and their granting it).

In my interviews and informal discussions with faculty members, all could think of situations where the school community, especially administration, treated women differently from men, particularly younger women. Luke, a coach, longtime member of the faculty, and graduate of the school, said that the administration has referred to him as “the golden boy” given his multiple roles and connections to St. Albert’s (as the father of two boys, presumably he will also be a future parent of St. Albert’s students). He said, “Being a graduate and a white male, I feel I am at the top of the food chain when it comes to how administration views me.” In contrast, he said, administrators treated female faculty “differently, even though they might not be aware of it.” He cited an example of a younger female faculty member who, based on student complaints, had a reputation for classroom management issues. Administrators visited her classroom several times and had frequent meetings with her; yet, he said there were many male teachers known for poor classroom management that he knew administrators never even spoke to; some were even promoted, perhaps as a way to get them out of the classroom based on student
complaints. Luke said, “I’ve noticed administration react to things regarding some female faculty members that I don’t think they would approach me about.” Molly, one of the women who spoke at the end of year assembly after the graffiti incident, echoed Luke’s sentiments when she told me, “Administration wants the women to be maternal or suck-ups to the men, and they’re not even conscious that they’re doing it.” As a result, she said, “strong” women have a hard time at St. Albert’s because students and colleagues “don’t know what to do with them.” As another coach and faculty member, Joe, told me, “Women teachers confuse [the students],” at least the younger, attractive ones, because students were supposed to acquiesce their power to them since they were the authority figures, but they viewed them more as sex objects and, as men, they were used to having the power in romantic relationships, a conundrum that disheartened me because it actually seemed a plausible reason for some of the power struggles I have had in my classroom at St. Albert’s.

Sara, cast as a sex object in the library graffiti, would be considered by most at St. Albert’s as one of the “strong” women Molly referenced in her interview. As such, not surprisingly, she rejected the role of victim and realized the potential power she had when she told me the administrators were worried about her suing the school for sexual harassment. In Sara’s end of the year review, when administrators focused on the graffiti incident and not on her teaching, she asserted her power by requesting their silence and attempting to reframe the conversation by asking administrators to consider what message our single-sex admission policy sent to students. Sara’s utilization of power and
voice served to disrupt the existing dynamic, at least temporarily. The administrators 
honored her request for silence by not mentioning the graffiti incident to her again, but 
they also responded with silence to her suggestion to talk about the implication of single-
sex education. As I mentioned earlier, she ultimately left the school because she 
perceived nothing had changed, giving credence to Molly’s comment that St. Albert’s 
was a difficult environment for strong women to navigate. (Incidentally, Molly also 
voluntarily left the school by the time this dissertation study had ended.) 

The silences about gender relations that resided in the interstitial space of the 
emotional relations structure, which focuses on who or what we desire and how those 
desires affect us and our interactions, revealed an obscured assumption of heterosexuality 
that reinforces hegemonic masculinity. As I have mentioned, at the time of this study, St. 
Albert’s was an institution where men were generally in charge of women, except in 
classes with female teachers, where women were expected to assert their authority as 
teachers over their male students. The female-led classroom reflected an overlap of the 
labor and power structures that faculty members acknowledged was problematic, 
especially if the female teacher was young. While younger teachers are obviously less 
experienced, and experience often invites respect and allows one to command authority 
with less questioning, the often unspoken assumption at St. Albert’s was that younger 
female teachers had a hard time in the classroom because their students saw them as a 
peer, and therefore a potential romantic or sexual partner, rather than an authority figure, 
a notion students alluded to in my interviews with them, which I discuss in Chapter 5.
This notion of the young female teacher as peer was only exacerbated by the lack of female students. In my interviews with faculty members of both sexes, many of them said they felt students put female teachers into two categories: mother figure or sex object, and the female teachers who rejected these roles ran into “trouble.” Sara summarized this binary well:

Kids are trying to find out if you’re going to be maternal or their girlfriend, and they can’t think of you in any other way than that. They either want you to take care of them or to sit there and flirt with them, and they don’t understand when you don’t want to do either. They don’t know what to do with you then!

In contrast, most faculty said students thought of their male teachers as coaches, mentors, and big brothers, and such asexual terms were how male faculty described themselves to me in interviews as well. Interestingly, no one used the term “father figure,” an oddity that even Maeve noticed despite it only being her first year at the school. If the library graffiti was any indication, at least one St. Albert’s student did desire his young, female teachers, and this desire certainly shaped his interactions with the school community in his decision to carve these fantasies into the library carrels.\(^\text{15}\) However, the notion among faculty that students categorized their female teachers as sex objects but not their young, male teachers as such reveals a silence about heteronormativity that was only reified by the distinction of St. Albert’s as a single-sex school for boys.

In the first chapter, I noted some of the arguments people use in support of single-sex schooling and how these claims can reinforce stereotypical views about gender and sexuality. One common belief among the constituents at St. Albert’s was that the

\(^\text{15}\) Though rumors indicated there was more than one graffiti artist, because I did not view it for myself, I cannot say so with certainty.
school’s single-sex environment was “less distracting.” As one faculty member stated in an anonymous survey, “I feel the boys are provided with a more focused atmosphere with less interruptions on the social level.” In my conversations with faculty, students, and parents, few detailed what this “distraction” meant, a veiled silence that Jackson (2010) deconstructed in her discussion on single-sex schooling:

Separating girls from boys based on the assumption that only girls distract boys and vice versa ignores the possibility of boys distracting boys and girls distracting girls – sexually and otherwise. These “dangerous presumptions” (Galleget of the ACLU, quoted in Salamone 2003, 16) can blind teachers, researchers, and policy makers to the existence of gay and lesbian students. Although co-educational schools can also be blind to queer students, setting up a school situation based on these assumptions can institutionalize this invisibility. (p. 233)

In fact, the bias against homosexuality at St. Albert’s did not go unnoticed by all. In the anonymous survey, a faculty member responded, “The type of discrimination that I feel is pervasive is against people of different sexual orientations,” a sentiment shared by student members of *Always Our Brothers and Sisters*, the gay/straight alliance on campus. Though most of the students in the club acknowledged that the attitude toward homosexuality at St. Albert’s was “better than a lot of other Catholic schools,” members also gave credence to Jackson’s (2010) assertion of institutionalized invisibility when they said they felt they were “hiding in plain sight” and that they were “not a minority you can put a finger on.” The pervasive silence about sexuality at St. Albert’s served to reinforce hegemonic masculinity and marginalize those who did not fit this “ideal.”

Communication relations, Connell’s fourth structure of gender asks: *What symbolic linguistic practices do we engage in? How do others resist or engage in these*
practices with us? Mazzei (2007a) wrote, “Silence is not an end in itself, as in negative theology, but a ‘caesura’ within language, not beyond language but a linguistic operation residing therein” (p. 41). In this section, I have shown how the linguistic operation of silence, what Achino-Loeb (2006) deemed a “linguistic erasure” (p. 4), served as a linguistic practice at St. Albert’s and interacted with the various structures of gender relations identified in Chapter 2. However, silence is just one linguistic act that contributes to reinforcing stereotypical gender norms that ultimately limited St. Albert’s community members: othering is another symbolic linguistic practice that played a role in gender construction at the school.

Othering

The silence at St. Albert’s empowered hegemonic masculinity, which led to many school community members othering groups that did not fit this ideal, such as women and girls, marginalized and subordinate men and boys, and students who did not, or could not, attend the school, which is the second sub-assertion I support in this chapter. Community members often “othered” these groups without realizing it. Citing Stuart Hall, Fine (1994) notes that creating or identifying an Other\textsuperscript{16} is a necessary part of how people define who they are: “[A] critical thing about identity is that it is partly the relationship between you and the Other. Only when there is an Other can you know who you are” (p. 72). Boesch (2007) highlighted that the Other is intricately tied to people’s perceptions of themselves: “Otherness is a relating term. There is no other without an ‘I.’

\textsuperscript{16} I capitalize this term throughout, as the literature on this topic does, to distinguish the word from the pedestrian use of “other.”
Therefore, ‘The Other’ is seen in the perspective of an individual” (p. 5). As such, one’s perception and construction of the Other need not be negative, nor is it constant; it can change over time, just as the ideal of hegemonic masculinity can.

However, references to the Other in this study’s data were not often neutral or positive, nor did people’s opinion of the Other change despite interventions to prompt such transformation (i.e., the response and professional development resulting from the library graffiti discussed earlier, and the unit I planned for my English class, which I discuss in the next chapter). Here, Kumashiro’s (2000) use of the Other proves most helpful. He defines

the term “Other” to refer to those groups that have been traditionally marginalized in society, i.e., that are other than [emphasis in original] the norm, such as students of color, students from under- or unemployed families, students who are female or male but not stereotypically “masculine,” and students who are, or are perceived to be, queer. (p. 26)

The term “othering,” then, has come to refer to the process whereby a dominant group defines into existence an inferior group (Fine, 1994). As Schwalbe et al. (2000) point out, “From an interactionist perspective, othering is a form of collective identity work (Hadden & Lester 1978; Snow & Anderson 1987; Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock 1996) aimed at creating and/or reproducing inequality” (p. 422). Borrero, Yeh, Cruz, and Suda (2012) use Kumashiro’s concept of Other (the noun) to define othering (the verb) “as a personal, social, cultural, and historical experience” (p. 3) involving categorization and labeling, and hierarchical power dynamics. “In this regard, ‘othering’ is viewed as a socially constructed practice that defines customs in silence [emphasis added] and voice.
Groups that have power maintain their status through protective actions that distance them from the marginalized” (Borrero et al., 2012, p. 5). At St. Albert’s, the processes of silencing and othering worked in tandem; when voices were excluded or silenced, particularly voices of marginalized groups, the silence better enabled the dominant group to other the marginalized by forming stereotypical, often false, constructions of them.

Given that schools are both agents of society and socializing agents (Chafetz, 1990), as I mentioned in Chapter 2, it is perhaps not surprising that schools play a major role in othering. As Borrero et al. (2012) explained,

Schools have the powerful potential both to “other” and privilege students (Kumashiro, 2000). Specifically, schools can be considered “spaces where the ‘other’ is treated in harmful ways” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 26) through specific actions by teachers, staff, and other students, as well as by inaction from teachers, administrators, politicians, and various individuals and groups with power over students (Horvat & Antonion, 1999; Kumashiro, 2000). (p. 6)

Though I showed in the previous section that silence can sometimes be a very intentional act, as choosing not to act (or speak) is in itself an action, I argue that inaction as Borrero et al. (2012) describe above can refer to silence in myriad ways. Teachers and administrators can be inactive in their quest to include Others in the curriculum, thus silencing those voices. They, along with students, can be inactive in their response to racist, sexist, and classist comments by remaining silent. And school community members can be inactive in empowering certain peers to speak, thus engendering a culture of silence that excludes certain ideas and voices from the larger institutional conversation. The actions that Borrero at al. mention are the inverse of these inactions: choosing curricula that perpetuate construction of Others, making racist, sexist, and
classist remarks, and silencing marginalized groups. As Kumashiro (2000) noted, “numerous researchers have documented the discrimination, harassment, physical and verbal violence, exclusions, and isolation experienced by female students (Kenway & Willis, 1998), by queer students or students perceived to be queer (P. Gibson, 1989), and by students of color” (p.26). Much of this behavior could be construed as othering.

As I noted in Chapter 3, when coding my data for “othering,” I noted who was othered, who was othering, and how the person or group was othered. Just as there are different kinds of silence, there are different categorizations of othering, which I used to guide my coding. Schwalbe and his colleagues (2000) write

[Othering] entails the invention of categories and of ideas about what marks people as belonging to these categories…The literature suggests that othering can take at least three forms: (1) oppressive othering; (2) implicit othering by the creation of powerful virtual selves; and (3) defensive othering among subordinates. In each case, meanings are created that shape consciousness and behavior, such that inequality is directly or indirectly reproduced. (pp. 422-423)

My analysis revealed many St. Albert’s community members othered women, gay men, and students who went to public schools in the area, which implied girls and boys who did not get accepted to St. Albert’s or could not afford to attend. This othering occurred in multiple ways and by multiple groups of people, which I illustrate below by highlighting both written and verbal discourse excerpts using the school’s printed materials, my interviews with faculty and students, and my transcripts from classroom discussions.

**Oppressive othering.** Schwalbe and colleagues (2000) define “oppressive othering” as othering that “occurs when one group seeks advantage by defining another
group as morally and/or intellectually inferior” (p. 423). The three groups of people St. Albert’s community members othered in this way can be traced back to the justification for its single-sex learning environment, posted on the school’s website:

Research shows that boys and girls learn differently. St. Albert’s is geared towards the distinct learning needs of boys and our teachers teach to the strengths of boys. Students feel safe to be themselves and take a sincere interest in their own intellectual, physical, spiritual, moral and creative formation. Furthermore, the unique brotherhood that develops between students here is something that unites them as a student body and carries into their lives as alumni.

The statement that girls “learn differently” from boys does not by itself define boys as morally or intellectually superior. However, when community members misconstrued this statement and said that an all-boys school meant the students didn’t have “distractions,” as I mentioned earlier, what they were really referring to were girls, and when they defined girls as “distractions” who might threaten the boys’ abilities to “feel safe to be themselves” rather than as intellectual equals who might offer different perspectives, it did define boys as intellectually superior while oppressively othering girls. Not surprisingly, this type of othering “commonly entails the overt or subtle assertion of difference as deficit” (Schwalbe et al., 2000, p. 423; emphasis in original).

This statement also conflates all boys into one category that has its own “distinct learning needs” and “strengths.” Earlier, when reviewing theories of gender, I mentioned many studies that have shown there are more differences within the sexes than between them. By grouping all boys together, St. Albert’s masked the many shades of masculinity, learning needs, and strengths of its student body, which made it easier for community members to perpetuate the stereotypical image of a St. Albert’s student as a
White, upper-class, heterosexual boy who was equally good at academics and athletics, thus oppressively othering those who did not fit this image, such as gays, those from lower incomes, those who were interested in the arts, and/or those who struggle academically. The last sentence of the statement cites the “unique brotherhood” the students have (a concept I will return to later), further othering those who did not fit in this unity.

**Oppressive othering of women.** Beyond the rationale for single-sex schooling, some St. Albert’s members engaged in oppressive othering of women by portraying them as weak and drama-laden. Joe, a coach and male teacher in the social studies department for 16 years, offered an example of the subtle characterizing of women as weak, both intellectually and physically, when he said:

> I don’t think women can do what I can do. You know, my relationship with my guys is almost like a coaching kind of environment. I think a lot of my success comes from the fact that I love the reading and I love the writing and I love the Red Sox and the Patriots, um…I love rock ‘n roll music. My interests parallel [my students’], except I know more about those things, so it’s really no hard trick for me…I’ve said this to [the women faculty] a million times, I mean, [their] job is twice as hard as mine. I mean, I’ve got ‘em when I walk in the door – deep in their hearts, they know I can take their life if I want to – not that I would. I know them, I know my stuff, I know how to make the links, I know how to draw them that way, you know? To be a role model in the sense that I’m a critical thinker and that I’m enthusiastic about many things that they like, so the things that they don’t like that I’m enthusiastic about, it’s easier for me to kind of draw them along in that way.

Here, Joe acknowledged the disadvantaged position women faculty at St. Albert’s had when he said that “[their] job is twice as hard” as his, but rather than attributing that difficulty to the culture of the school and considering how he might play a role in it, he
suggested the fault is with the women. By saying that women cannot do what he does, he seemed to suggest the *reason* their job is twice as hard is because they are physically weaker (They cannot take their students’ life or even give the illusion that they can.) and intellectually inferior (They don’t “know their stuff,” cannot “make the links,” nor can they possibly be a role model for critical thinking.). The undertone of Joe’s view of his role versus that of women teachers is that he has a unique relationship with “his guys,” that women faculty simply can not develop by virtue of being female.

Joe’s view was not representative of all the male faculty I interviewed; in fact, I identified most of the men I spoke to as feminists, but *all* of those men recalled times when they were silent as well, fearful to convey what Joe seemed to suggest – that women were weak. For instance, Dennis, a member of the math department, said, “I’ve seen the younger female teachers in sticky situations and I want to speak up on their behalf, and I don’t because I don’t want to reinforce a stereotype of rescuing the ‘damsel in distress.’ And I am never sure that’s the right move.” In Dennis’s situation, as in the other interviews of which this excerpt is representative, a fear of portraying women as weak actually further contributed to this image of them.

In classroom conversations, most students portrayed women as emotionally weak. On the anniversary of a St. Albert student’s death, I recounted for my junior class when I learned the student had died, I felt terrified because I did not know the student’s name at first and feared it was one of my own. When I heard otherwise, I felt relieved and then guilty for feeling relieved. One of my students, Raymond, then added: “And then you
cried and ate a lot of ice cream,” perhaps to add levity to the sober conversation. Some students chuckled, and Dane, another student, said, “And listened to Adele.” I questioned why they thought I would respond like that, especially since I have never said anything to suggest crying, eating ice cream, and listening to Adele were among my preferred coping mechanisms, and Raymond shrugged and said, “That’s the image I have.” Relying on stereotypes is another shade of oppressive othering, which “can also take the form of turning subordinates [in this case, women] into commodities” (Schwalbe et al., 2000, p. 423). In fact, students frequently cited the stereotype of girls as unable to control their emotions as a reason for why the all-boys environment at St. Albert’s worked well. St. Albert’s junior Chris echoed many students’ sentiments when he succinctly said in his interview with me, “Don’t take this the wrong way, but a lot of girls bring unnecessary drama, completely unnecessary.”

These discourse excerpts show that some community members of St. Albert’s had clearly established rules for how men and women should behave, or at least were thought to behave. Schwalbe et al. (2000) claim that one of the tools groups use in oppressive othering “are the rules of performance and interpretation whereby members of a group know what kind of self is signified by certain words, deeds, and dress” (p. 424). Taken as a whole, then, these excerpts suggest that at St. Albert’s, boys and men were sports fanatics, critical thinkers, physically strong, and in command of their emotions. Girls and women were not. Therefore, female faculty who “know the code [can] know how to elicit the imputation of possessing a desired kind of self” (Schwalbe et al., 2000, p. 424).
Below, I discuss other ways in which women tried to adapt to the culture of the school, including my own survival strategies, but this idea of working the “code” to fit in was supported by many female faculty members I spoke to, one who said, “This school is not for the faint-hearted [women],” and another said, “To survive here, you need to have male traits…you need to like sports, and you need to be tough.” After all, as Schwalbe et al. (2000) pointed out, “a code that treats a male body…as [a sign] of competence peremptorily discredits those with female bodies” (p. 424).

**Oppressive othering of gay men.** Though they have male bodies and were therefore not discredited in the same way women were, gay men were another group subject to oppressive othering at St. Albert’s, mainly because some students perceived that gays identified more with “womanly” traits and therefore did not fit the male code detailed above. As Kimmel (1994) writes,

> Women and gay men become the “other” against which heterosexual men project their identities, against whom they stack the decks so as to compete in a situation in which they will always win, so that by suppressing them, men can stake a claim for their own manhood. (p. 134)

Not surprisingly, possessing traits thought of as womanly was a classification St. Albert’s students believed boys were supposed to avoid, and this belief and their enactment of it contributed to the hegemonic masculinity that prevailed at the school.

In my junior English class one day, Chris offered an example of an activity that did not fit the male code when he mentioned that he helped his mom in the kitchen once and would never do it again because his older brother and father ridiculed him. Another
student, Carter, commented, “What was your dad like – ‘All right, Nancy boy, you like cookin’? We’ll send you to cookin’ school!”

I interjected, “If you get married someday – to a woman – do you expect –”

Chris quickly reassured me and the class, “Yup, pretty sure it’s to a woman!”

“Okay,” I continued, “so if you get married someday, do you expect that she’ll do all the cooking because you don’t want to be in the kitchen?”

Chris replied, “Honestly, yes, I expect there to be food when I come home. I’m not gonna force it because I don’t want to sleep on the couch.”

“All right,” I said. “And if your son wants to help out your wife in the kitchen, is that okay?”

Chris said, “If my son wants to cook, I’m not gonna say no, but I’m gonna give him crap for it. Oh, it’s fair game. If he’s making himself lunch, I’m not gonna…. [but] if he’s making a chicken dinner for, like, 6 kids and Oh, you’ve got to dice it up just like this [mimics effeminate voice while pretending to cut vegetables], I’m gonna mess with him.”

In this situation, Chris recounted learning that helping his mother in the kitchen was “unmanly” given the “swift and severe social sanctions” (Schippers, 2007, p. 95) his brother and father imposed with their teasing. By the end of the anecdote, Chris made a clear distinction about when it was okay for a man to cook: to be self-sufficient in meeting one’s basic needs (i.e., it would be okay if his future son is in the kitchen making himself some lunch). However, preparing food for others, particularly a more elaborate
dish, was clearly relegated to “woman’s work” in Chris’s mind, and a man who engages in it must be gay, which he made clear by using an effeminate voice to demonstrate cooking instructions and stating that he would “mess with” his son for doing so. For a few, the conflation of stereotypically female traits, chores, and interests with those of gay men was so intertwined with the traits, chores, and interests of women that it was hard to tease the groups apart. For instance, when my class started talking about gender at the start of the unit I describe in the next chapter, Raymond timidly prefaced a question by saying, “This is going to sound bad, but it’s not really that bad.” He then asked, “If you’re homosexual, does that mean you want to be the opposite sex? Like, does a gay guy want to be a woman?”

Because “gay” was synonymous with “womanly” in some St. Albert’s students’ minds, they actively rejected the label, even when it was directed at them in jest, which further served to subordinate gays and women. St. Albert’s students’ sexual orientations were often called into question the moment they told their friends they were going to the school, a phenomenon I was aware of because it occurred when eighth graders in my public school left our system to attend St. Albert’s. In fact, when I asked my freshmen classes how many of them were called gay when they told their friends they were coming to St. Albert’s, every single one raised his hand. It was as though students from their coed middle schools surmised that the lack of girls at St. Albert’s was such a drawback that the only reason the school’s students would want to attend were if they were gay.

Being the subjects of homophobic slurs caused some students to outwardly accentuate
their heterosexuality and hegemonic masculine traits to remove any doubt. As one student in my junior class, Topher, explained, some boys are sexist and homophobic “not because they don’t like gays but because they don’t like being called gay as a nickname and stuff…if someone calls you a ‘homo,’ you, like, do whatever it takes not to be called that.” Another student added that being called gay is embarrassing, which Chris elaborated on: “The way they say it, there’s, like, a derogatory term that goes with it….because the way society puts it…it’s a put down.”

**Oppressive othering of boys who attend local public schools.** Most secondary and post-secondary schools have rivalries with competing institutions and others in their area, and St. Albert’s was no different. However, the way in which many students and a few teachers talked about area schools and their students is considered oppressive othering given the exclusionary nature of the school; by denigrating these institutions, they not only put down students who chose not to attend St. Albert’s, but they also othered those students who could not attend the school by virtue of their sex or economic status. In this way, they continued to oppressively other women even though their comments were ostensibly only directed toward the school systems at large or the boys who attended them.

One of the sources of these comments against other schools, and therefore also against students who attended them, was teachers. Because 99% of St. Albert’s graduates would continue their education at 4-year colleges, the question was not if St. Albert’s students would pursue higher education, but where they would matriculate. As with most
college preparatory schools, St. Albert’s believed its reputation was contingent in part on getting kids into big name schools, enough so that a few teachers seemed to actively discourage kids going to lower-tier, less expensive options like the area community college or local state school, options more commonplace for graduates of area public high schools. I have overheard a teacher say, “Oh, come on – this is an easy question – this is for the kids in public school!” When students didn’t do well, a small number of students claimed a teacher would make a comment like, “Well, I guess you’re going to Salem State!”

Most students echoed these sentiments. At sporting events, opposing teams often chanted, “We’ve got girls!” to which St. Albert’s students responded, “That’s all right, that’s okay, you’re going to pump our gas some day!” Each of the five junior students I interviewed during the gender unit I discuss in Chapter 5 made negative comments about the public schools in the area. Stokely’s exchanges with students at the public school in his town were similar to the athletic jeers. When someone told him he must be gay because he attended St. Albert’s, he said, “Okay, well, let’s see what college you’re going to in a couple of years.” One prevailing attitude among students was that the teachers and students at public schools had little motivation for success. Chris said, “I didn’t want to go to my town’s school because it’s just horrible. The kids don’t try. They don’t care. They just go. At St. Albert’s, you cannot do that. You have to give at least a little effort.” Brad concurred. “If I went to [my public high school],” he said, “their teachers aren’t as good and they just throw work at you, and that’s why a lot of people fail over
there…they don’t really care.” Dane’s comments were similar, but he focused more on the aesthetics of some of the public school buildings. He told me that at his best friend’s school in the area,

teachers just walk around. I mean, [the area] schools are crappy. One of my friends goes to [the local high school] and they didn’t have walls in their classrooms for the longest time…ceilings were missing, they had like curtains for walls…It’s a crappy school in general.\footnote{At the time of the interview, the school he referred to was undergoing renovations, so Dane’s assessment might well have been accurate.}

Topher explained that his older brother chose their local high school over St. Albert’s because he “has learning disabilities; he’s got an IEP,” as though students with Individualized Educational Plans did not attend St. Albert’s.\footnote{In a recent report to the Board of Trustees, St. Albert’s noted that over 10% of students declare having an IEP during the application process. The actual number is higher, though, because students often did not disclose their IEPs during admissions because they perceived it would hurt their chances of getting accepted.}

This othering of schools in proximity to St. Albert’s suggested that they were full of unmotivated, unsuccessful teachers and students, some of whom had learning issues, and none of whom would go on to desirable universities, but embedded in this othering is another privileged silence. Community members at St. Albert’s did not give voice to the fact that these “crappy” public schools educated the area girls who, by virtue of their sex, were denied admission to St. Albert’s. In fact, there were limited private school offerings for girls in the area, and only one Catholic coed high school nearby, which was another school students specifically mentioned as being subpar. The students also said nothing about the tuition a St. Albert’s education carried, which, despite the financial aid available, put it out of reach for many boys in the surrounding areas. In short, many of
St. Albert’s students failed to identify the privileged position the student body possessed, making it easier for them to other those who did not enroll. Though their comments were ostensibly aimed at the boys in these other schools who chose not to attend St. Albert’s, because they were silent about the privilege of being a male whose family could afford the education, their othering also included boys who could not pay the tuition along with girls who could not even apply.

**Implicit othering.** The exclusivity at St. Albert’s allowed the school to engage in implicit othering, a specific type of othering “typically done by elites or would-be elites” (Schwalbe et al., 2000, p. 424). In this kind of othering, inequality is reproduced by identity work that upholds the dramaturgical fronts of the powerful. These fronts obscure discrediting backstage realities, create powerful virtual (i.e., imputed) selves, and implicitly create inferior Others. The impression that elites possess powerful, worthy selves – no matter the reality – can induce feelings of trust, awe, and/or fear that help to legitimate inequality and deter dissent (cf. Della Fave 1980; Wolf 1986). (Schwalbe et al., 2000, p. 424)

One of the ways St. Albert’s upheld a powerful, “dramaturgical front” was by projecting the image of wealth and academic prestige. When asked what people arriving to campus for the first time might notice, my junior English students commented on the well-maintained grounds and the high-priced cars parked in the student lot. The dress code, which required students to wear a collared shirt, dress pants, a belt, and dress shoes, and permitted students to wear sweatshirts only with a college or St. Albert’s logo on it, also communicated a polished appearance that comes with a certain level of class. As my student Dane put it, “If I had just walked into St. Albert’s for the first time, I probably would have thought that it was a school full of rich, snobby kids, from the cars outside to
the dress code.” Another student, Chad, said, “It looks like it could be a college, [so] you must be smart to go [here].”

**Implicit othering of lower classes.** This illusion isolated those who felt they did not have the “right” background to be at St. Albert’s and perhaps even prevented students and faculty from applying due to perceived inadequacies. Matt, a St. Albert’s teacher for over 16 years, was highly sensitive to issues of class, having attended a trade school and gone to one of the state schools so often used as an insult, as noted earlier. He told me in an interview,

> If I were to apply now, I wouldn’t even be given an interview…because I didn’t go to Dartmouth or Notre Dame or Harvard – and I don’t mean to be putting down all those people who did – but now, I really feel that with the administration and the board of trustees, you have to have a certain college name that looks good in the literature that they send out to prospective students. I firmly believe that. When was the last time somebody from Salem State or a state school was hired here – other than UMass? I don’t know.

Because his background was a “backstage reality,” Matt acknowledged the virtual front St. Albert’s maintained for what it was and was more aware of this reality in others. As he said, “One of the things that really bugs me about this place is the elitism. Many of the kids who come here aren’t wealthy. That’s an unfair stereotype. I think the school needs to publicize [the extensive financial aid they offer] more.”

Instead, St. Albert’s maintained the image of a selective, elite prep school, which belied the reality. For instance, Topher’s comment that his brother was on an IEP, so he did not come to St. Albert’s, suggested that his brother either would not have gotten accepted had he applied, or he would not have been able to handle the academic rigor had
he attended. However, well over 10% of St. Albert’s student population had an IEP at the time of this study, and the school did accept students with learning differences and more severe challenges, such as Asperger’s and Tourette’s syndrome. In fact, in the ten years prior to this study, the admissions process was not as selective as it might have been in previous decades given the nationwide enrollment decline in Catholic education mentioned in Chapter 1. In addition, while the school offered academically rigorous courses and a strong honors and AP curriculum, the majority of students took college placement or accelerated level classes, which were generally more similar to mid-level classes at a public school. Interestingly, the students I interviewed who painted such bleak pictures of public education and its students and teachers who don’t try were all students enrolled in the lowest level junior English class St. Albert’s offers, and, as I describe in the next chapter, were often not the most motivated scholars. In this case, they stood behind the “dramaturgical front” of St. Albert’s as an academically rigorous school to inflate their own academic standing.

Institutional implicit othering of women. The implicit othering I have described so far focuses more on class and academics, but “another way that inequality is linked to the fashioning of superior selves is suggested by studies that have used the concept of ‘moral identity’” (Schwalbe et al., 2000, p. 425), and in this sense, St. Albert’s attention to the whole-person and issues of diversity blinded itself to the ways it was not fulfilling this mission. Schwalbe et al. (2000) cited one study in which “members of a holistic health organization were so invested in thinking of themselves as virtuous because of
their nonconventionality that they failed to see how their efforts to be ‘alternative’
reproduced conventional gender inequalities in pay and status” (p. 425). In a similar
way, St. Albert’s was so invested in thinking of itself as an institution that “inspires [its
students] to honor the diversity that enriches both [its] school community and the world
beyond” that it failed to see how their commitment to social justice was not as all-
embracing, particularly when it came to issues of gender. The school offered clubs
that celebrated multiculturalism, such as the Asian Cultural Club and the aforementioned
L.U.N.A., and they created a Multicultural Affairs and Community Development office
whose director organized activities such as the Multicultural Celebration night and the
Martin Luther King, Jr. dinner, and escorted students to a local workshop for high school
students on race, culture, and ethnicity. These initiatives were noble pursuits, but by
focusing its diversity activities on race and ethnicity, the school further othered women
and legitimized inequality by implicitly communicating that women were not a minority
group worth studying.

Implicit othering of women by “nonexist” men. Implicit othering with regard to
gender also occurred when men who engaged in sexist behavior seemed unaware of their
actions because they believed themselves to be committed to social justice. For instance,
Joe told me he had witnessed sexism at St. Albert’s: “Sometimes guys will talk about
women in ways that I don’t think are right [and] I’d say, you know, ‘You shouldn’t say
that,’ or ‘That’s not appropriate.’” By identifying himself as one who spoke out against
derogatory remarks toward women, Joe categorized himself as one who does not engage
in such behavior; however, it was clear this categorization was another “dramaturgical front” when, at the end of our interview, he made a sexist remark by commenting on my chest and saying he wasn’t sure where he should look. At lunch, another male faculty member said, “The way we can save money is if we just give the women $5,000 less than the men.” When I shot him a disapproving look, he chuckled and said, “You know I’m just kidding,” acknowledging the remark was sexist and implying that he would never actually believe such an idea. Just as the students I interviewed used St. Albert’s academic reputation to gloss over their own lackluster classroom performance, some of the more sexist male faculty members hid their chauvinistic behavior behind the virtual identity that St. Albert’s had as an institution committed to social justice.

**Defensive othering.** The final category of othering Schwalbe and colleagues (2000) identified differs from the other types in who commits it and for what purpose. Defensive othering “is identity work done by those seeking membership in a dominant group, or by those seeking to deflect the stigma they experience as members of a subordinate group” (p. 425). In this way, unlike the previous types of othering, “defensive othering does not define into existence a group of exploitable Others; rather, it is a reaction to an oppressive identity code already imposed by a dominant group” (p. 425; emphasis in original). At St. Albert’s, women engaged in defensive othering as a way to manage the “Other” label and possibly elevate their own standing at the school among students, faculty, and parents.
Defensive othering of women by St. Albert’s women. Earlier, I mentioned my students imagining me crying, eating a carton of ice cream, and listening to Adele songs as a reaction to hearing the sad news of a student’s death. As Schwalbe et al. (2000) explain, defensive othering “involves accepting the legitimacy of a devalued identity imposed by the dominant group, but then saying, in effect, ‘there are indeed Others to whom this applies, but it does not apply to me’” (p. 425). By repeating what they said as an incredulous question, as though I could not possibly have heard them right because the thought of me responding in such ways was completely out of character, I distanced myself from the stereotypical image of females – “Others” – to show that I was not like the emotional, maybe irrational girls upon whom they based such an image; in contrast, I was stoic, in control, and more like the stereotypical “strong boy” society encouraged them to be.

On the other hand, when I had the opportunity to engage in defensive othering but refused, I struggled with the message I sent. In a later discussion, my student Chris insisted that I must have had a moment in my life when I wanted to “bash someone’s face in.” I maintained that physically fighting someone has never entered my mind, and my students claimed that boys did it all the time to resolve their problems with each other, an interesting admission given how easily they classified girls as the ones who “bring drama” and can’t keep their emotions in check. As I noted in my teacher journal:

I did contend that it’s this ability to put it out there and move beyond it that has always attracted me to boys. I told the students that I always had more guy friends, particularly in college, because, with them, you always knew where you stood, and you could tell it like it was, and it was done. If someone bothered me,
or if I bothered one of my guy friends, you could say what it was that annoyed you, and it would be settled. With girls, however, things were never discussed, and they just festered. Someone was always upset with someone else, but no one ever wanted to talk about it, and if I put it out there like I did with my guy friends, the girls got upset. It was just so much easier with the boys.

Thinking back on this conversation, I wonder how a conversation like this contributes to reinforcing gender stereotypes. Throughout the conversation, Chris was really trying to bridge the gap and present the urge to fight and be aggressive as a non-gendered one – insisting, for instance, that I “couldn’t tell him I haven’t wanted to punch someone in the face.” By my insisting that I have never had that urge, am I communicating that aggression is a gendered trait? And if I am communicating that – because I am inclined to believe it – is that bad? Am I reinforcing the idea (that’s already persistent) that girls bring drama and are emotional when I share with them my take on my college friends? And is that bad? When I explained that I did not fit that particular mold – and that I “put it out there” – someone said it is because I am “feisty.” I dismissed that, which I hope communicated that my action and desire for confrontation was not unique to me (and therefore could be shared with other girls), but I am not sure I was successful in interrupting their preconceived ideas of how girls behave.

Other female faculty members displayed defensive othering in similar ways. For instance, in my interview with Peggy, a member of the English department who had been at the school for over 30 years, she repeatedly stressed that she generally got along better with the male faculty than the female faculty:

There’s a couple of women who seem to want to make trouble…and I don’t really know why. I try to stay away from it as much as I can. I have never had a problem with a man at this school, but I have had trouble with women. A lot of women will talk behind your back and you can walk into a room and all of the sudden, you hear this whispering that’s going on….I think with men, when men are upset with you – and as I’ve said, I’ve never had a problem with a man ever, ever – men will come to you and say, “You know, that really bothered me that you did this,” but women will, I guess, talk behind your back and try to make little coalitions or something, try to get a little group, and before you know, you’re thinking, “Wait a minute? Am I the bad guy? What have I done?”
In our characterizations of ourselves as women who had always gotten along well with men and who appreciated direct communication and confrontation, Peggy and I confirmed the stereotype that women breed drama and then distanced ourselves from those drama-laden Others by making it clear that our personalities aligned more with men. In doing so, we also confirmed the conventional wisdom that, at St. Albert’s, women faculty needed to act more like men in order to survive. As Carol told me: “The women who find themselves teaching here and enjoying it and feeling secure have more male attributes, so there’s a strong point of relation [with the men].” Schwalbe et al. (2000) posit,

> Though defensive othering is an adaptive reaction, it nonetheless aids the reproduction of inequality. When members of subordinate groups seek safety or advantage by othering those in their own group, the belief system that supports the dominant group’s claim to superiority is reinforced. (p. 425)

So, while distancing ourselves from “Other” women, Peggy and I (and the other women who engaged in defensive othering) only further added to the plight of females on campus, ourselves included.

**Brotherhood**

The final sub-assertion I make is that the silence and othering – both activities of exclusion – that occurred at St. Albert’s helped contribute to the notion of unity in a “brotherhood” that was repeatedly referenced throughout the community in school materials and faculty and student interviews. This sense of a united “brotherhood,” in turn, perpetuated the silence and othering, a cycle demonstrated in Figure 4.2 below. My analysis revealed many St. Albert’s community members clung tightly to this
brotherhood, but some felt excluded from it and a few others actively rejected it. In this section, I demonstrate how this concept both unified and divided the community by drawing on discourse excerpts from the school’s promotional materials, my interviews with faculty and students and my transcripts from classroom discussions, as well as presenting a vignette from a particular class discussion.

Figure 4.2. The cyclical relationship of silence, othering & brotherhood

Homosociality. Understanding homosociality and fratriarchies is crucial to recognizing how this larger concept of brotherhood was operationalized at St. Albert’s. Bird (1996) defines homosociality as the “social bonds between persons of the same sex and, more broadly, to same-sex-focused social relations” (p. 121). Thus, this term can refer to women as well as men. However, it is important to consider male homosocial bonds when studying masculinity, since “masculinity is a homosocial enactment. [Men] test [them]selves, perform heroic feats, take enormous risks, all because [they] want other men to grant [them] [their] manhood” (Kimmel, 1994, p. 129; emphasis in original).

Male homosociality takes on a different shade when the bonds are institutionally tied, such as at places like St. Albert’s. Flood (2008) explains
The institutional ordering of tight bonds among groups of men, whether in militaries, bureaucracies, or workplaces, often is accomplished through the exclusion of women and an ideological emphasis on men’s difference from and superiority to them. Men’s dominance of political and economic hierarchies is sustained in part through informal male bonds, homosocial networks sometimes colloquially and yet accurately described as “old boys’ clubs.” (p. 342)

The brotherhood that existed at St. Albert’s was directly tied, by name, to the “old boys’ club” that founded the school. The school’s website explained this history:

As a Xaverian Brothers sponsored school, we continue the work of Theodore James Ryken, a young shoemaker of uncommon vision who founded the Congregation of the Brothers of St. Francis Xavier in Belgium in 1839.

Inspired by the conviction that faith finds its full expression in service to others, Ryken set out to establish a “brotherhood, a society of men, bound by vows of religion and living in community” to work among the poor. This commitment to those who live on the margins of society endures as a fundamental Xaverian value, and it informs everything that we do at St. Albert’s.

The school actively communicated the historical ties of the brotherhood to the community; beyond the website and the mission statement, Theodore Ryken and the Xaverian Brothers were frequently mentioned at school-wide liturgies, prayer services, class meetings, and in religious studies classes, and students were receptive to this information. In an interview with Brad, a student in my junior class, he said,

I would think that people who don’t go to the school would [think St. Albert’s believes boys are superior to girls], or people who don’t know enough about the school would think that. But if you go back to the history, like of the brothers who created this school, like they didn’t create the school for that matter, they created the school for the education of boys: just to educate them, make sure they get a good foundation within the Catholic religion and stuff like that. So it’s just, you would need to know what’s going on, you know what I mean, to really understand.
Here, Brad relied on what he believed were the intentions of the founding order to discount people’s impressions that the school might privilege boys over girls with its single-sex distinction. However, he failed to consider that those intentions did privilege boys over girls because they included educating boys to join the Xaverian Brothers order, a religious fraternity of sorts that is not open to women and is tied to the larger patriarchy of the Catholic Church. Thus, to build up this brotherhood, both the Xaverian Brotherhood and the one that existed at St. Albert’s, the school kept women out.

In doing so, the brotherhood at St. Albert’s served to build up strong teamwork and a sense of belonging among its male students, which the school touted. The admissions office claimed, “the unique brotherhood that develops between students here is something that unites them as a student body and carries into their lives as alumni.” Many students embraced this sense of unity and community. Topher, one of the students I interviewed from my junior class, told me,

I do feel like there is a sense of brotherhood here. There’s like a different feeling and a different sense of camaraderie in community that you don’t get [anywhere else]. There’s kids that if I went to public school that I wouldn’t even think to talk to, but since it’s St. Albert’s, not even because it’s social status, because like I feel like there’s no cliques or groups at St. Albert’s. You can just talk to anybody.

Likewise, Chris, one who mentioned the brotherhood most frequently in our discussions, recounted an event that occurred on a service trip he had just taken to the Dominican Republic where two underclassmen he did not know before the experience got caught in an undertow. He cited the St. Albert’s brotherhood as a motivator for him swimming back to shore to recruit four other students to go back out to get them. At one point,
Chris said he was underwater lifting a kid so that student could get air. It was a
dangerous situation that he labeled as “the scariest moment [he’s] ever been through,” but
Chris said the brotherhood at St. Albert’s was so strong that he didn’t think twice about
his actions:

I knew that if I was in their situation, I would have friends come out and get me. And I would expect them to come and get me like they expected me to go get them. So now I know that if I was ever in that situation, if roles were reversed, they have my back.

Though I hope – and assume – Chris would have reacted the same way had the drowning student not been a St. Albert’s classmate, I did not press him on the issue in the interview.

Sanday’s (2007) work on fraternities is helpful in understanding the important role the brotherhood plays in students’ lives. Through her research, she discovered that

the depth of the emotional bond men feel for their fraternity is explained by the degree to which this bond helps to compensate feelings of inferiority and powerlessness in a society that privileges male bonding. Fraternity brothers do not become friends or teammates or colleagues; they become brothers. (p. 151; emphasis in original)

One fraternity brother she chronicled, Sean, “recognized that fraternity life also offered a ‘new family’ to compensate for the loss he felt at leaving his own family” (p. 150).

While St. Albert’s students did not leave their families to attend the school, most students definitely separated from their family of friends at their previous schools, and they said this separation became more marked as they progressed through St. Albert’s. Topher told me, “All those friends that I had in middle school, they don’t really want to have a lot to do with me…just because, you know, you’re kinda out of sight, out of mind.” Hence, most students identified more as “brothers,” and their commitment to the brotherhood
was stronger, the longer they were at the school. The one exception in my research was Dane, who actively rejected the notion. He said, “I think the brotherhood at this school is kind of a [marketing scheme] to get people to come here. Like, ‘Oh, it’s a brotherhood! We’re all together!’ I think the brotherhood thing’s kind of stupid, to be honest.”

Interestingly, Dane also had the most egalitarian views about gender roles and seemed to have the most contact with his pre-St. Albert’s friends, which I discuss in Chapter 5.

For most students, though, this identification with their “brothers” was so intense, and the social distance between them and their old friends was so great, that by the time they got their licenses and had more freedom over their social calendars, they still opted to hang out with their St. Albert’s classmates because they were more at ease around them. As my junior student Stokely told me,

There’s closer friendships between guys. Like you’re not really scared to talk about much things. Like you can just talk about anything when you have friends at St. Albert’s. And then like, there’s no embarrassment, I guess. So people do stupid stuff that they wouldn’t normally do with women around.

In Sanday’s (2007) case of Sean, he found that it became difficult to have a good time with other friends, especially with women, because the special secret understanding was missing and he did not feel comfortable conducting a relationship on any other basis than the one he became accustomed to [with his brothers]. (pp. 152-153)

Indeed, most St. Albert’s students recognized that the male-bonding inherent to the school’s brotherhood made it more difficult not only to relate to those previous male friends who were not part of the brotherhood, but also girls. Topher told me, “Kids I was friends with in middle school [who attend St. Albert’s], they were a lot more comfortable
with girls [in middle school] than they are now because they just don’t see ‘em enough and don’t interact with them.”

**Homosociality and othering.** Certainly, having a sense of community at school is important, but the ways in which this community was built came at a cost to some, as Topher hinted. At St. Albert’s, this “institutional ordering of tight bonds” was not only accomplished through excluding women (both female students, physically, and female teachers, metaphorically) but also through excluding, via silence and othering, the variety of groups I have previously mentioned. Wadham (2013) further highlights the connection of homosociality to othering:

Two points that permit me to begin to explore and explain the character of homosocial bonding are clearly articulated: firstly that “identity and boundary maintenance [fraternity] are double edged” (Broderick 2012, 34). That is, fraternity is crucial to strong teamwork but it can also culminate in very strong them and us attitudes, often inferiorising or denigrating the other. (p. 221)

The brotherhood at St. Albert’s was double-edged in that it did foster a sense of belonging for many students and faculty by building up an “us” attitude, as evidenced by the students’ comments above, but it also left out other community members who were on the other side of the equation of “us vs. them.” For instance, Patty, who had taught in the world languages department for eight years, told me,

The [refrain of] “We are St. Albert’s,” while it’s meant to build this community...what they stress is the idea of building this band of brothers because they’re an all-male organization. But what they’re talking about is building community, and when they continue to use that charism, they’re excluding women. We’ll be a “band of brothers,” but I’m a [female] chaperone [on a trip that uses these ideas as its mantra], so I’m glad you guys feel like a band of brothers, but you’re not including me in that conversation. So, while I think the charisms of, you know, trust, and zeal, and all that kind of stuff – they’re good;
they’re not inclusive, and we need to use inclusive language. That terminology is about building community…but in every community, there’s diversity.

Patty also referenced the “loose” language and actions male faculty members engaged in with their classes, citing one faculty member’s incessant swearing, sometimes even at students, and another teacher’s drawing of a Venn diagram that purposely resembled breasts. When the teacher asked a student what was on the board and the student identified it as a Venn diagram, the teacher said, “No, they’re breasts. You must be gay.” The teachers in both cases defended their behavior to Patty as ways that guys relate to each other, implying she could not understand, nor engage in similar behavior had she wanted to, because she was a woman.

**Fratriarchy.** This type of sexist jocularity is characteristic of a typical fratriarchy. Flood and colleagues define fratriarchy as “a fusion of ‘patriarchy and fraternity’ [that] involves the rule of brotherhoods or fraternities, as opposed to patriarchy’s rule of fathers” (Flood, Gardiner, Pease, & Pringle, 2007, p. 216). A fratriarchy embodies four principles: 1) it is a mode of male domination; 2) it is based on the self-interest of the men associated with it; 3) it involves a group of boys who want the license to do as they please and enjoy themselves; and 4) it involves the domination of primarily young men who have not yet undertaken adult responsibilities (Remy, 1990). Building on Remy’s principles, Wadham (2013), citing Loy, identifies four criteria of fratriarchy:

First, fratriarchy is tribal, constituted by men with a sense of licence because of sport, elitism and a youthful aggression/exuberance…Second, initiations mark fratriarchies, as rites of passage, and the administration of hierarchy (Booth 2002,
12)...[The] third criterion is that those who cannot “hack the pressure” drop out leaving a highly conforming and integrated group. Finally, Loy explains that: “fratriarchies foster male domination in at least three ways: they bring men together, they keep men together, and they put women down” (1995, 267). (Wadham, 2013, pp. 226-227)

Chris exemplified these fratriarchal traits when he explained how the brotherhood would be challenged if girls started attending the school:

If you bring in the girls, it’s more of like, you gotta think before you act with your friends. Usually when you’re with your friends, and it’s all guys, it’s more lackadaisical and you can just mess around, mess around, not worry about offending anyone who’s like nervous, I guess. And then if [I’m hanging out] with girls, I’m always like, more thinking of what I say before I say it.

In short, while the school said it was “dedicated to helping young men grow as people of faith, wisdom and brotherhood,” the brotherhood at St. Albert’s seemed to carry a license to check decorum at the schoolhouse door.

Perhaps the most disconcerting part of this brotherhood, though, was the risky behavior students engaged in to gain membership into it and maintain their status within it, which coincides with fratriarchy’s “youthful aggression” and “initiations as rites of passage” (Wadham, 2013, pp. 226-227). Kimmel (1994) states, “Masculinity as a homosocial enactment is fraught with danger, with the risk of failure, and with intense relentless competition” (p. 129), particularly with other men because it is they who grant “acceptance into the realm of manhood” (p. 128). Though in my eleven years at St. Albert’s, I had never witnessed a fight, nor had I seen or heard of instances of hazing, how this concept of dangerous homosocial masculinity was enacted at St. Albert’s
became clearer to me when my students talked about locker boxing, a phenomenon also known as helmet boxing.

**Locker boxing.** Simply put, in locker boxing, two kids agree to fight in a locker room while wearing helmets and gloves, often after a game or practice for a contact sport. Though I first heard about locker boxing from my juniors in 2013, apparently the activity had been around for a while. In 2007, ABC’s *Good Morning America* even ran a segment on it to tip off parents that it was happening and to warn kids of the dangers of it. While articles and TV segments like *Good Morning America*’s did not explicitly classify locker boxing as a male activity, I have never heard of girls suiting up and engaging in this endeavor where the point is to battle it out until one of the fighters loses a helmet or gets knocked out. Spectators frequently film these fights on their cellphones and upload the videos to YouTube and Facebook to document the occurrence, which has resulted in disciplinary action for players on some teams that have banned the practice, and have strict penalties for engaging in the behavior.

At the end of a class, my juniors and I were talking about bullying and whether they had been in a physical fight before. The bell rang just as students raised their hands to demonstrate their involvement in a prior altercation. On his way out the door, Chris proudly showed me a video on his phone of him fighting another kid at a summer sports camp. When I asked what had happened to cause the fight, Chris said that his opponent was actually his best friend and that they were fighting not over an issue but rather “for fun.” Chris even gave his phone to another camper and asked him to film the event.
Though I could not recall the last fight I had witnessed, the videotaped fight was violent enough that I wondered whether I should report it, despite Chris’s claim that it had happened over the summer at a non-school sponsored camp. (I did end up sharing the information with both the lacrosse and hockey coaches.)

I was even more horrified when I brought the topic of locker boxing up in the next class to continue the conversation on bullying, and the students did not classify the activity as such, particularly because both parties agreed to locker box, and at the end of the fight, as Chris explained, “you hug it out, and you’re boys” (i.e., brothers). The students told me that unlike the Good Morning America report that claimed there were “no rules” in locker boxing, there was unspoken code that dictated this practice: 1) you should not ask someone to locker box if he is smaller than you because you will get a reputation as a “pussy”; however, 2) if you say no to a locker box invitation because your challenger is bigger than you, your teammates will find someone more your size to locker box instead, or your challenger will locker box someone bigger than him before he fights you; 3) both parties must agree to locker box; however, 4) you cannot say no without consequences; 5) if you refuse to locker box, you will suffer payback from your challenger as well as your teammates at the next practice; 6) at the end of a locker box, you hug it out and leave as closer friends.

Because it involves helmets and gloves, locker boxing is specific to sports involving that equipment, although the general consensus was that hockey and lacrosse players engage in the practice more than football players. As Brad, a football player, told
me, “We’re not crazy. We’re a little more…uh…we carry ourselves a little better than that.” Chris’s logic was a bit more practical; he explained that football players typically didn’t locker box because “they get their anger out on the field just by hitting whatever’s moving,” and in hockey and lacrosse, “you can’t always do that.” The students told me locker boxing started when they were in middle school, and one student recalled it began when he was only 9, as this is when kids start traveling for sports and having overnight sports camps.

Beyond the danger inherent in getting knocked out, even if wearing gloves and a helmet, the prevalence of locker boxing raises several concerns, particularly when viewed as a homosocial act that served as an aggressive fratriarchal custom that helped one assert his status in the brotherhood. First, not only was this activity a form of ritualized bullying, but the boys involved in it refused to see it as such. They disregarded the act as bullying primarily because it was a supposedly agreed upon act among friends and teammates that resulted in bonding, not alienating. Topher explained, “It was kind of like a bonding experience, almost. Like, you’re kicking the tar out of each other, but it’s like fun at the same time.” When I challenged my students on one’s ability to say no to an invitation to locker box, most still resisted seeing the act as a form of bullying:

*Ms. McEachern: You don’t see it as a form of bullying.*

Chris: No.

*Ms. McEachern: So, if you are bigger than me and I’m a guy, and you say you want to locker box, are you telling me that I am totally free to say, “No I don’t want to”?*
Chris: Absolutely not.

*Ms. McEachern:* Okay...

Chris: You have to. No matter what.

*Ms. McEachern:* So don’t you think there are kids that don’t want to do this?

Chris: Yeah. I know. I know there are. That’s irrelevant.

*Ms. McEachern:* Okay. So, you’re not, you’re not taunting?

Chris: Not taunting. It’s his choice.

*Ms. McEachern:* But it’s just an unspoken culture that you really can’t say no.


Only one student I spoke to about this activity eventually conceded that locker boxing was a form of bullying, but even then, he laughed it off and seemed to dismiss it as amusing:

*Ms. McEachern:* Would I really feel like I could say no? So even though it’s not, nobody’s really taunting me like, “Say yes! Say yes!” I would feel, my perception would be that I had to, like I didn’t have a choice.

Stokely: That happens a lot.

*Ms. McEachern:* Okay, so isn’t that a form of bullying?

Stokely: Uh, I don’t see it as a form of bullying, no. I guess…it’s just…I don’t know. Let me think. I don’t think it’s a form of bullying, it’s like…wow… Maybe it’s a form of bullying (laughs).

*Ms. McEachern:* This is why, you guys are all talking about this so freely, and like it’s not a big deal, and I’m sitting here wondering what planet are you guys on?

Stokely: It’s not a big deal (laughing), because yesterday I was talking, because Chris has a video of him locker boxing with some other kid, and Chris beat him pretty bad. And I talked to him in the locker room, I was like, “I saw you got beat
by Chris in the locker boxing.” He goes, “Yeah, he hit me pretty hard.” We were just laughing it up. It’s funny (laughs).

In this retelling, even though Stokely was not involved in the fight, nor did he witness it, the locker boxing incident still served as a bonding ritual because he and Chris’s opponent could laugh about it. If such behavior was deemed a bonding experience in this brotherhood, and if the boys could not see how damaging this could be to a fellow “brother,” both physically and psychologically, it is not such a stretch to wonder how the boys might victimize others outside the brotherhood and excuse that behavior as well, as the fraternity brothers did in other studies (see, e.g., Sanday, 2007; Wadham, 2013).

Another point of concern is how widespread this activity, and others similar to it, was. Every student I spoke with had either locker boxed before or engaged in comparable behavior. For example, Brad, who relied on his status as a football player to engage in defensive othering to separate himself from the “crazy” locker boxing lacrosse and hockey players, told me that, in football, players got “birthday beatings, but that’s it.” When I asked if these punches were hard with the intent to hurt, Brad said

Pretty hard, yeah. It’s, I mean, we do it as if we’re all big brothers of each other, you know? We do it, I mean I guess you get some pleasure from it, seeing other people like in pain sometime, but it's just, it’s more of a bonding experience… Nobody really looks forward to it, it just happens.

Dane, who played baseball, claimed he had never locker boxed and had not even heard about the activity until that school year. However, he added, “in baseball we would wrestle and beat the shit out of each other, but it wasn’t like fighting. It was more like
who could pin the other kid down.” Stokely, a wrestler, had also never locker boxed, but he had “body boxed,” which seems even more dangerous:

Because when you don’t have helmets or mitts, which is what characterizes the locker boxing, you have body boxing. There’s a set of rules: you can’t punch him in the face obviously because that will just get him mad and then you’ll both get heated and that’s when it turns into a real fight. But you always like hug it out at the end, it’s never really like an anger issue.

The students’ cavalier attitudes toward this violent bonding helped them to equate these fights as “fun,” which helped to further ingrain such activities into the culture of the brotherhood.

It is important to note that every student I talked to agreed that this practice was not specific to St. Albert’s sports teams; in fact, some assured me the activity occurred only on club teams, not the school’s teams. While these claims might have been true, this outside activity certainly affected St. Albert’s students and became part of the culture of the school in that they shared fight videos with each other and were aware of who had fought whom. Physical aggression became part of the climate and encouraged boys to engage in it – if not the activity itself – then definitely talk of the activity. In fact, the male teachers with whom I shared my knowledge of this phenomenon said the boys probably did not participate in as many fights as they led their classmates and me to believe but felt forced to exaggerate their involvement to maintain their status in the culture. Kimmel (1994) notes,

The fear of being seen as a sissy dominates the culture definitions of manhood. It starts so early. “Boys among boys are ashamed to be unmanly,” wrote one educator in 1871 (cited in Rotundo, 1993, p. 264)… Violence is often the single most evident marker of manhood. Rather it is the willingness to fight, the desire
to fight….As adolescents, we learn that our peers are a kind of gender police, threatening to unmask us as feminine, as sissies. (pp. 131-132)

Chris gave credence to Kimmel’s arguments when he said, “Guys fight. If you don’t fight, you’re not considered a man. You’re not like, come on, like the comments if you don’t fight, like, ‘just be a man,’ ‘sack up,’ I guess, that’s what I want to say.”

In this chapter, I have analyzed some of the salient activities that defined the culture of St. Albert’s, which is necessary to understand the context in which my English classroom operated. In describing the school culture and how various Others are constructed, I speak to one of my research subquestions, *How did the school culture shape the ways my students and I constructed gender?* I return to the themes of silence, othering, and brotherhood in the next two chapters as I turn my analysis to my own classroom and practice.
Chapter Five  
Taking the Boys to Herland: Embracing and Resisting the Journey

Billy: Ms. McEachern, I could have this class all day. This could just replace all my classes.

Carter: Ms. McEachern, I just want to let you know this classroom isn’t like *Herland*. It’s all men. And just you.

In Chapter 4, I considered how gender was constructed, discussed, and enacted within the larger school. In this chapter, I move from the locker rooms and hallways of St. Albert’s School into my own English classroom to analyze how my students and I constructed gender, particularly when we worked with strategic texts to call attention to gender issues. I argue that the required English curriculum at St. Albert’s served mainly as a mirror for dominant students (White, heterosexual, upper middle class boys) by reflecting their experiences back to them in the texts they read, presumably to engage them with the reading and help them make sense of their lives. However, the curriculum did not provide many windows into the larger world to encourage students to see beyond their own experience, which curriculum theorists suggest schools also should include for balance (see, e.g. Kraver, 2007; Kumashiro, 2000; McIntosh, 1983; Noddings, 1989; Style, 1996). In other words, I argue that experiencing an androcentric curriculum helps reinforce the notion that the White male point of view is the norm, and a school with no female students and little racial and ethnic diversity ought to prioritize the inclusion of these alternate perspectives in the curriculum to give students a more realistic world view. Failure to do so could perpetuate the cycle of silence, othering, and brotherhood that I discussed in the previous chapter.
In this chapter, I concentrate on a literature unit I designed in keeping with the requirements for English 3 (i.e., American Literature of literary merit that encourages critical thinking), but also in an attempt to interrupt the displays of hegemonic masculinity that I found pervaded the larger school culture. Here, my ultimate goal was to use my classroom to work toward a more gender-just society, not just at St. Albert’s but also to prepare my students for the world beyond. Keddie (2006) explains:

A gender justice perspective that draws on feminist principles to focus on valuing difference and diversity provides a platform for teachers to begin articulating “ways of being” with boys and, within this framework, to begin questioning and challenging rather than reinscribing the narrow or dominant versions of gender and hierarchical constructions of masculinity that constrain boys’ (and girls’) academic and social outcomes. (p. 102)

My hope for this unit was to interrupt the culture of silence, othering, and brotherhood by introducing works, some female-authored, that encouraged my students to question how we define masculinity and femininity and the implications of those constructions since I was not sure they had had opportunities to engage in such conversations in their previous English classes. I also wanted students to enjoy the reading to disprove the popular notion that boys cannot relate to “girly” books (St. Jarre, 2008).

Through analyzing my lesson plans, teacher journal, class discussions, student work, and student interviews, I argue in this chapter that the unit had successes, but my goals were not fully realized, partly due to the gendered personas my students and I adopted in the (relatively) homosocial classroom space we shared, personas that often belied our private beliefs. In Chapter 4, I explained the concept of homosociality and its role in promoting the brotherhood at St. Albert’s. Here, I purposely use the adjective
“homosocial,” defined as “seeking enjoyment, and/or preference for the company of the same sex” (Lipman-Bluman, 1976, p. 16), rather than “all-male” to convey the classroom as a male-dominated social space. In doing so, I answer one of my main research questions, How was gender constructed in the context of an English course at an all-boys Catholic secondary school? as well as some of the subquestions that go with it, As the classroom teacher, what role did I play in the construction of gender in my classroom via my pedagogy, and interactions and relationships with my students? How did students construct gender? Just as I did in Chapter 4, I built this chapter’s argument in keeping with Erickson’s (1986) notion of “evidentiary warrant,” wherein the researcher interprets the amounts of coded data to make claims while rejecting other alternative hypotheses. For instance, in this chapter, my experience in the English department led me to suspect the curriculum was male-centered, but because I only taught two grade levels, this experience might not have been representative of the entire department. It was not until I coded the book lists and required titles that I was able to confirm my suspicion and reject the possibility that my experience was an outlier. The argument is graphically represented in Figure 5.1 below.
Figure 5.1. Chapter 5’s main argument and supporting evidence

I planned the unit to interrupt the dominant constructions of gender at the school and offer students alternative views of gender.

However, those goals were not fully realized due, in part, to the gendered personas we adopted in the homosocial classroom space.

These personas often differed from our private beliefs.

Primary Data Sources & Codes to Show Dominant Constructions of Gender and Standard Curriculum:
- English Curriculum (Sh-Wom; Sh-LGBTQ Sh-So; Sh-Race; Pris; Mm-Hm)
- English Department Reading List (Sh-Wom; Sh-LGBTQ Sh-So; Sh-Race; Pris; Mm-Hm)
- Student Interviews (Mf-Hf)

Primary Data Sources & Codes to Demonstrate Goals of Unit:
- Unit Lesson Plan & Handouts (Mm-Hm; Mm-Sm; Mm-Cm; Mf-Hf, Mf-Cf, Mf-Sf)
- Teacher Journal (Mm-Hm; Mm-Cm; Mm-Sm; Mf-Hf, Mf-Cf, Mf-Sf; Girls-Pos)

Primary Data Sources & Codes to Display Unrealized Goals:
- Class Discussions (Mm-Hm; Mf-Hf)
- Class Assignments (Mm-Hm; Mf-Hf)
- Teacher Journal (Mm-Hm; Mm-Cm; Mm-Sm; Mf-Hf, Mf-Cf, Mf-Sf; Girls-Pos)

Primary Data Sources & Codes to Illustrate Gendered Personas in Class:
- Class Discussions (Mm-Hm; Mf-Hf)
- Teacher Journal (Mm-Hm; Mm-Cm; Mm-Sm; Mf-Hf, Mf-Cf, Mf-Sf; Girls-Pos)

Primary Data Sources & Codes to Illuminate Private Beliefs:
- Student Interviews (Mm-Hm; Mm-Sm; Mm-Cm; Mf-Hf, Mf-Cf, Mf-Sf)
- Teacher Journal (Mm-Hm; Mm-Cm; Mm-Sm; Mf-Hf, Mf-Cf, Mf-Sf; Girls-Pos)
The structure of this chapter follows the argument as portrayed in Figure 5.1. First, using the school’s book lists and published curriculum guidelines, I show how the required English curriculum at St. Albert’s lacked diversity, particularly with regard to women and non-hegemonic gender depictions. Then, I outline the goals for a particular unit I designed to try to bring gender issues to the surface, drawing on my teacher journal and the written materials I used to communicate these goals to my students for data sources. Next, by highlighting excerpts from class discussions and student work, as well as student interviews, I show the unit’s successes but also how my goals for the unit were not fully realized, and I argue that a major hindrance to achieving these goals was the gendered personas the students and I adopted in the homosocial classroom space. To further display these personas, and to demonstrate how they often differed from the way we conducted ourselves elsewhere, I offer case studies of four focal students and how they conformed to the homosocial classroom. In Chapter 6, I turn the analytic gaze on myself and provide further analysis of my practice.

**The Many Mirrors in St. Albert’s Traditional English Curriculum**

When I first started teaching at St. Albert’s, I was hired to teach two sections of English 4 (British Literature) and two sections of English 1 (Introduction to Literary Genres). With a stronger background in and passion for American Literature, I jumped at the chance to swap my English 4 load for two sections of English 3, American Literature, during my third year at St. Albert’s. I devoted the first week of the course to coming up with a working definition of American Literature by posing such questions as, *Is*
“American Literature” literature written by Americans? If so, how do we define who “counts” as an American? Does the work have to take place in America? And what “counts” as “literature”? Once a class worked through these questions and arrived at a definition (which inevitably changed as the year went on), I asked students to identify American authors with whom they were familiar. This question initially stumped them, but slowly they started uttering names. Perhaps predictably given the traditional literary canon, the students identified Steinbeck, Fitzgerald, Twain, Vonnegut. Then I interrupted and asked them to name female American authors, too, surprised that I had to add the qualifier. Silence. I added that female poets would be fine as well. Finally, someone uttered Maya Angelou’s name, but her name was the extent of the collective list.

I wondered how they could be entering their junior year and not have familiarity with female voices, but then I considered the perennial texts on my booklists: A Separate Peace (Knowles, 1996), The Catcher in the Rye (Salinger, 2001), Old School (Wolff, 2003) – in short, books about (White) boys at all-boys prep schools, written by White men. Style (1996) points out,

White males find, in the house of curriculum, many mirrors to look in, and few windows which frame others’ lives. Women and men of color, on the other hand, find almost no mirrors of themselves in the house of curriculum; for them it is often all windows. White males are thereby encouraged to be solipsistic, and the rest of us to feel uncertain that we truly exist. In Western education, the gendered perspective of the white male has presented itself as “universal” for so long that the limitations of this curriculum are often still invisible. (p. 37)

When St. Albert’s hired me, the English chair told me what books other members of my department were teaching, and I followed their cues and adopted their book titles for the
sake of consistency. However, by thoughtlessly copying the teachers in my department, I became part of the problem in perpetuating a curriculum that mirrored (most of) the boys’ experiences but never challenged them to look beyond their immediate worlds. This fact and its implications were invisible to me until this episode with my first English 3 class who was unable to identify an American female author beyond Maya Angelou.

The book titles the English department assigned were overwhelmingly male-centered (see Appendix G). Out of the 115 paperback titles the department ordered for the 2012-2013 school year (excluding anthologies and teacher-supplied handouts), 95 were male-authored, just shy of 83% of the texts. Of those titles, 80 of the authors were White, male writers whose protagonists were White men (almost 70% of all the texts). Of the 20 female-written titles, 4 of them were texts I alone assigned to my class, and 3 of these were new to my syllabus specifically for this teacher research project. Twelve of the other female-penned works were each assigned by single teachers, meaning each of those books was for one particular class based on teacher preference rather than texts adopted by multiple department members for a whole level (for example, all sections of English 3 Honors). Even the four female-authored works assigned by more than one teacher were not assigned to an entire grade but rather only to certain levels within that grade. In short, depending on which teachers they had, students could have conceivably graduated from St. Albert’s never having read a novel by a female author.

Of course, teachers can address gender, race, class, and sexual orientation in any text they teach and need not have female, Black, poor, and/or lesbian-authored works or
protagonists to give them “permission” to do so. In fact, as I showed in Chapter 4, looking at what is not said around issues of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation is often just as powerful an analysis as looking at what is stated clearly. However, the culture I recounted in Chapter 4, coupled with students entering their third year at St. Albert’s unable to name female authors or readily recall reading about female characters, suggested most teachers did not capitalize on the gendered silences in texts. Style (1996) argues,

[T] hose whose (white male) experience is repeatedly mirrored are narrowly and provincially educated to see themselves (and their own kind) as the only real players on life’s stage…they miss half of what a balanced education should be for all of us:
• knowledge of both self and others,
• clarification of the known and illumination of the unknown.
All students deserve a curriculum which mirrors their own experience back to them, upon occasion – thus validating it in the public world of the school. But curriculum must also insist upon the fresh air of windows into the experience of others – who also need and deserve the public validation of the school curriculum. (p. 38)

Considering that the English department had the highest concentration of St. Albert’s graduates as teachers at the time of this study (over 25%), issues of the school as a vehicle for cultural production and reproduction come to the forefront. If teachers teach what they know, and they mainly know a male-authored world, they will be more likely to pass that knowledge to their students unless they have experiences that interrupt and redirect that cultural reproduction. A case in point here is one St. Albert’s graduate/English teacher, whose liberal college experience opened his eyes to multicultural issues and homophobia, a word he had never even heard in his time as a
student at St. Albert’s. Although as a teacher he assigned only 2 female authors out of his 25 titles, his book list adoptions were the most racially diverse of the department’s, and he also assigned a book with a male character questioning his sexuality.

The books that are required reading in classes are only part of the curriculum, of course. According to the school’s website description of English 3,

This course introduces the student to the themes and ideas prevalent in the development of American literature. The composition component of the course continues the development of the writing skills necessary for all college-bound students. Students will write a research paper. The SAT exercises include vocabulary in context study, critical reading skills and familiarity with the test format.

Teachers were required to teach the following, in any order of their choosing:

- *The Great Gatsby*
- *A Streetcar Named Desire*
- *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*
- A contemporary novel, such as *Ceremony*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, and/or *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
- A modern drama, such as *The Crucible*
- 19th century poetry
- 20th century poetry
- A work(s) from Hawthorne
- A work(s) from Thoreau
- A work(s) from Hemingway
- Selected excerpts from 18th and 19th century short stories and essays

The department claimed that it used the literature, writing assignments, and class discussions “to introduce students to the issues and ideas that will help them to explore their own identity and the nature of the world around them” (St. Albert’s website; emphasis added), but nothing in the course description or required titles made explicit reference to how they addressed the second part of their goal. The NCTE’s “Guidelines
for a Gender-Balanced Curriculum in English Grades 7-12” offer guidance here. The position statement posted on NCTE’s website states

As teachers and adults who work with adolescents, we advocate wide reading of good literature as one way for students to have vicarious experiences in which they can identify with strong characters across a wide range of human experiences which cross traditional gender boundaries. But if texts and the characters in them remain gender-bound, the ideas which might cause adolescents to develop expectations for the future, responses to life’s events, and stances on issues may also remain stereotypically gender-bound.

How might department members’ assigned texts, writing assignments, and class discussions have looked had the department required that its English 3 courses had a balanced curriculum representing multiple American perspectives in addition to covering the chronology of American themes? What if almost every text were accompanied by a counter-narrative, as Kumashiro (2000) and Noddings (1989) have suggested? For instance, in addition to reading *The Great Gatsby*, what if students also read *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as a counter-narrative to contrast a White, Northern male protagonist’s quest for the American Dream with a Black, Southern female protagonist’s search for independence in a similar time period? Had such policies been in place from freshmen year on, would my English 3 students in 2005 have been able to name female authors? Would the larger culture of the school have been any different? I believe so.

**Installing Windows: The Gender Unit as a Thermostatic Activity**

To try to interrupt St. Albert’s students’ dominant constructions of gender, I planned a unit that offered windows not just on female voices, but on alternate masculinities and femininities. To provide a conceptual framework for this gender unit
and my goals for it, I rely on a metaphor from radical critical educator Neil Postman (1979), who wrote about teaching as a “thermostatic” activity (p. 19). Postman likened culture to an ecosystem that needs checks and balances to provide homeostasis; if a given force is allowed to dominate, it will damage the ecosystem. Teachers, then, need to respond to the ecology they confront. To explicate his point, Postman (1979) wrote, “Education tries to conserve tradition when the rest of the environment is innovative. Or it is innovative when the rest of society is tradition-bound…The function of education is always to offer the counter-argument, the other side of the picture” (pp. 19-20). In the case of my English classroom, the ecology I was responding to was the all-male school; the counter-argument I sought to offer was to broaden the definition of what it meant to “be a man” or “be a woman” so that students could resist some of the school’s hegemonic masculine aspects. According to Johnson and Weber (2011), who argue for a “genderful pedagogy,” teachers should not place an emphasis on a gender-free utopic culture where social identity markers no longer apply in some equivalent to “color blindness,” but in a genderful pedagogy that acknowledges plurality and works to appreciate that different bodies, practices, and identities can be identified as healthy and necessary. (p. 139)

Of course, my intention here in altering the curriculum was not solely for the benefit of my students. I believed that if they were to resist some of the gendered practices at St. Albert’s, my role as a female teacher would be easier and more enjoyable, and I might have felt as valued as my male colleagues.

To make my teaching a “thermostatic activity,” my plan was to open up some windows, which I did from the start of the school year. The unit began mid-year after we
had already covered Thoreau, Hawthorne, and selected 19th century poetry, with a concerted effort on my part to include less-anthologized female poets and those from other non-dominant populations. We discussed literary periods such as Transcendentalism, Puritanism, Rationalism, and Realism, repeatedly returning to the question, *What defines American Literature, and who says so?* Again, all throughout the fall, the class had read selected works from voices not historically part of the canon. In addition, students responded to “Articles of the Week,” which I posted regularly on our class website. These articles were current news stories, such as *Time Magazine*’s person-of-the-year runner-up feature on Malala Yousafzai, and editorial pieces, such as *Ms. Magazine*’s blog article after the Sandy Hook tragedy, entitled, “Why Won’t We Talk About Violence and Masculinity in America?” The students wrote brief responses and answered questions about the author’s purpose and tone, identifying specific language and rhetorical devices that led them to their answers.

Aside from the current events articles, in late fall, I broke the literary timeline I was following in the course to teach the play *The Laramie Project*, which our school’s drama guild performed. The play is about the town of Laramie, Wyoming’s reaction to the 1998 murder of openly gay student Matthew Shepard. I chose to incorporate the play into my curriculum for several reasons, the most important of which was to help transition to, and gather more information for, the unit I had been planning. Because the play focused on a marginalized gay man who was killed, in essence, by homophobic attitudes, I thought the subject matter would provide a springboard to the discussions I
hoped to have after Christmas vacation when we started the gender unit and I started this
teacher research study. I wanted to have more insight into the students’ perspectives on
gender relations and issues of sexual orientation before selecting which students would
serve as the focal students for the project.

We began the gender unit with direct instruction on different theories of gender,
namely the three most prevalent models I outlined in Chapter 2 (biological essentialism,
sex role theory, and social constructionism). For the first six class periods, I incorporated
songs, documentary clips, short activities, and readings to make students more aware of
the gendered perspectives we adopt as readers (Martino & Mellor, 2000) and focused our
discussions on stereotypes and assumptions surrounding boys that lead to the
perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity (see Appendix H for class schedule).

By the sixth class in the unit, we also turned our discussions to the stereotypes and
assumptions surrounding women that lead to the perpetuation of an unjust gender order.
The students read Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s short story, “An Unnatural Mother.” The
purposes of this reading were to introduce them to Gilman as a formidable feminist
writer, and to give them practice applying the theories of gender to a shorter text
depicting a more traditional society before we turned to a longer work portraying a more
fantastical world. Written in 1895, the short story is about Esther, a woman who is the
subject of the town’s gossips (also women) because she does not measure up to their
standards of what a mother ought to be—namely, a woman who puts her child above all
other pursuits and people and adheres to the old adage that children should be seen and
not heard. At the end of the story, readers learn that Esther died to save the town from a flood, abandoning her child to do so. Though the child survives, as do all the townspeople, the irony is lost on the gossips who would rather denigrate Esther’s mothering skills than acknowledge that those same “poor” skills saved their lives and the life of her child.

By the seventh class of the unit, we started reading and discussing Gilman’s novella, *Herland*, which I summarized in the first chapter of this dissertation. Not only does the story serve as an allegory for my exploration of the all-male world of St. Albert’s, but the story also uses three male protagonists to explore the all-female utopia, and I thought the students would be better able to find a way “in” to the text with a male protagonist, albeit one written by a woman. Because the three male explorers adopt various types of masculinity from Connell’s framework, I also thought students would be able to see the different classifications more easily and, hopefully, relate to one particular character. I anticipated they would find it challenging to accept that, in the absence of males at Herland, its female inhabitants view themselves as androgynous, not particularly feminine or masculine. Another key feature of *Herland* was its length of just over 100 pages because I classified this group as reluctant readers who often struggled to complete reading a short story for homework. We focused on *Herland* for 12 class periods, during which students wrote daily guided “quick writes” based on the story, took reading quizzes, discussed the theories of sex and gender, and wrote two papers (a creative and a critical assignment; see Appendix I for paper assignments).
Unit Successes

In many ways, the literature unit was successful. The texts brought the topic of gender relations to the fore, gave students more exposure to a female author and female protagonists, allowed for critical classroom dialogue, and encouraged the students to widen the space of “acceptable” masculinity practices. In the section below, I analyze the unit’s benefits using excerpts from student work, class discussions, and my teacher journal.

Changing conceptions about masculinity. After we had reviewed theories of sex and gender and engaged in an activity that showed how gender affects our reading of texts, we explored masculinity in today’s society. In their guided quick write about what it means to be a man and whether that was different from being “male,” all students referred to aspects of hegemonic masculinity in their definitions. For instance, Dane wrote, “When I mean, act like a man, I mean, like, watch sports, drink beer, work.” Raymond echoed others’ responses when he said that to be a man meant being physically, emotionally, and mentally tough. In Greg’s definition, he also added the responsibility to provide for oneself and one’s family. Some students mentioned that a man is adventurous, a leader, and a gentleman who acts chivalrously toward women.

Given these definitions, it was not surprising that when I asked them a week later which *Herland* explorer they most identified with, most students chose Terry, the character who embodies hegemonic masculinity, and the reasons for their selection mirrored their definitions of manhood. Ricky, for example, defined being a man as being
a leader and an adventurer, and in his explanation of why he identified with Terry, he wrote, “Terry was an outdoorsman…[he] was out for adventure and kept the group in a straight track.” Many of the students who selected Terry also cited his wealth (He is the explorer who funds the trip and provides the boat and private plane to get to Herland.). As David put it, “[Terry’s] a man’s man. He’s a rich, adventurous guy who kinda gave me a James Bond vibe.” Because students’ justifications for identifying with Terry echoed their definitions of what it means to be a man, it suggests that they not only acknowledge society’s dominant constructions of masculinity (via their definitions of what it means to be a man), but that they also accept it and envision themselves embodying that construction (via explicitly identifying themselves with a character who fit their definitions). Since Terry’s arrogant and chauvinistic ways were evident to me from the start of the story, that he was the character most of them related to disappointed me, but, knowing how the story ended, I was also hopeful that students would see how problematic Terry’s hyper masculine stance was and would later change their minds (and perhaps alter their perceptions of what it should mean to “be a man”).

Class discussions on gender, particularly masculinity, and the reading, suggested that students’ views did change. The first discussion that challenged students’ constructions of masculinity was early in the unit when we listened and read the lyrics to Brad Paisley’s song, “I’m Still a Guy” (see Appendix J for lyrics), which states that while the narrator of the song might engage in feminine behavior to suit his (female) partner’s liking – i.e., carry her purse in the mall, or walk her “sissy” dog – he’s “still a guy.” The
class as a whole did not like the song. In particular, Chris said he “had a real problem” with the stanza about men waxing, getting facials, and manicures because those were not activities that guys should do. To push back, I mentioned the recent documentary *Mansome* that chronicled the rise of the “metrosexual” who pays careful attention to grooming and hygiene. Carter said that his mother tried to get him to wax his eyebrows once, but he said, “Hell, no!” I asked what was wrong with getting your eyebrows waxed, and Chris stared at me in disbelief until Raymond matter-of-factly mentioned that he had had his eyebrows waxed since he was 12. Carter, giving him the chance to revoke his admission, said, “You do NOT get your eyebrows waxed.”

When Raymond continued to speak about it without embarrassment, the class’s perception shifted. Carter, initially so adamantly opposed to the idea eventually conceded, “I’m not against it, but I’m gonna wait a few years.” Stokely then offered that his mom made his dad wax his eyebrows. Chris was slower to come around. When I asked Raymond where he went to have this done, Chris, visibly uncomfortable with the conversation, mumbled, “This is awkward.”

I asked the class, “Don’t you think it’s better to have your eyebrows waxed than have the unibrow? Who’s that basketball player that’s –?”

Stokely jumped in and said, “Anthony Davis.”

Referring to his infamous unibrow, I said, “That is NOT okay.”

Carter concurred, “Who has not told him that he needs to take care of that?”
When we returned to the song lyrics, Chris acquiesced that, yes, it might be okay for guys to get waxed, but he pointed out that the rest of the actions were off base, for instance, the manicures:

Chris: I don’t know any guys other than Raymond that gets…manicures, waxed, botox, deep spray tan…

Ms. McEachern: Let’s clarify – Raymond only mentioned the waxing.

Raymond then shared that he had actually also had a manicure before when he was 15, and the class shouldn’t knock it. Chris then said that if someone paid for him to get one, he “would do it,” which marked quite a sharp turn from the stance and attitude he had adopted just minutes before. I later asked the focal students in interviews what they thought about how quickly the class seemed to deem these actions acceptable – if not for themselves, then at least for other men – after Raymond’s admission, and they all indirectly referred to the notion of the St. Albert’s brotherhood by saying students did not want to alienate Raymond because he’s a classmate (i.e., brother), which I believe speaks to the possibility of dominant constructions of masculinity changing in certain settings. In other words, if this example is any indication, then if more members of the brotherhood spoke as openly as Raymond did about engaging in stereotypically feminine behavior, the definition of what it means to be a man and what behaviors are socially acceptable for men in that context might broaden.

How the character Terry fares in *Herland* influenced other changes in the students’ perceptions of manhood. Throughout the novella, Terry becomes more and more agitated that he is unable to exercise the construct of masculinity he has embodied
for so long. In Herland, his wealth means nothing, his sense of adventure is squelched once the women sequester the men and study their every move; more importantly, though he is surrounded by women, romantic relationships with men are so foreign to the women that he is unable to have the sexual conquests the text suggests he had prior to his arrival. In fact, the women gravitate more to his comparatively effeminate travel mates, Van and Jeff. Put simply, Terry is stripped of the masculine identity he worked so hard to achieve, and he does not handle it well. Interestingly, rather than empathize with this character, the students were annoyed with him. When I asked the class which explorer they identified with toward the end of the reading, the responses were much more varied than they had been a week and a half earlier, with only a small number choosing Terry, and about half choosing Jeff, the embodiment of subordinate masculinity in that he is most like the women of Herland. Stokely, who picked Jeff at both the beginning and the end of the story, explained, “He is mild, timid, and has a ‘tender soul’…He has a lot on his mind and is very smart. His nature is very kind and he stands always on the side of the village women.” Four students switched from Terry to Jeff, and almost all of them cited Terry’s attitude toward women as a factor. William said he picked Jeff “because of the way he acts and treats women.” He wrote, “One of the main reasons I identify with Jeff is because he treats women with respect and actually cares about their feelings.” Even students who chose Terry the second time around offered quite different reasons than the ones offered toward the start of the unit. Chad, the only student who switched to Terry rather than continuing to identify with him from the start, picked him because he
was the one explorer who realized they were essentially being held hostage. He wrote, “I would want to try everything I could to get away from the world of women,” a sentiment Greg and Dane also noted in their rationales. The small number of students who selected Van did so because they deemed him “logical,” “understanding,” and “knowledgeable.”

The students’ new identifications with the explorers did not necessarily mean that their constructions of masculinity changed in less than two weeks. In fact, had I asked them to write again about what it meant to be man, I suspect their answers very well might have been similar to their first ones. However, given how bound up their character associations first were to their definitions of manhood, the drastic differences in their responses toward the end of the story indicated the text and our discussions had encouraged them to broaden their definitions of masculinity – and, by extension, themselves. In fact, in one of their final guided quick writes, I asked the class to explain how well Van, Jeff, and Terry would fit in at St. Albert’s were they to enroll as students, and almost all of the students wrote that Terry would not be happy at St. Albert’s because there would be no place for his rebellious ladies’ man image, and he would probably choose to leave or get kicked out. The frequency of this type of response further confirmed for me that the students who had earlier idolized Terry’s James Bond-esque character eventually came to realize that this persona did not serve boys well, at least at St. Albert’s.

**Appreciation for space to talk about gender issues.** Another benefit of the unit was that it served as a safe space for students to talk about and process gender issues,
which students told me they had only had the opportunity to do in their religious studies classes that year (junior religion course requirements are Relational Dynamics and either Social Action or Social Justice). Every student I interviewed for the project confirmed what I had suspected based on the class’s level of engagement and participation throughout the Herland unit: they enjoyed it as much as or more than other units we had completed. Interestingly, each student I interviewed cited a different part of the unit as being his favorite. One mentioned an exercise we completed from Gendered Fictions (Martino & Mellor, 2000) where students had to supply the gendered pronouns that had been stripped from a text. Another noted learning the theories of gender was helpful to his understanding of what he believed. A third said Herland was one of his favorite books, and the fourth focal student particularly enjoyed the work we did on understanding boys and the gendered assumptions people make about them.

One particular activity that prompted interesting discussions and writing was reading a short piece called “Simply…Understanding Boys” from September, 1987’s issue of New Internationalist, a selection included in Martino and Mellor’s (2000) Gendered Fictions, a collection of writing and literacy activities to encourage gender work in English classes. Working in purposeful pairings, students examined one of seven sections focusing on boys (e.g., Boys as Babies, Boys as Bullies, etc.) and decided which of the following eight assumptions Martino and Mellor provided best fit their section:

1. Boys have little control over the expectations foisted upon them.
2. Most boys are sexist and homophobic.
3. Adults contribute to the victimization of boys who are different by accepting and encouraging stereotyped macho behaviors.
4. Boys are not encouraged by adults or their peers to be sensitive or to express their emotions.
5. Boys are not given the opportunity to talk honestly about sex.
6. Bullies are not understood or adequately dealt with by school authorities.
7. Most boys do not see girls as friends and do not understand them because they are not encouraged to do so.
8. Single-sex education is detrimental to boys’ development of more positive relationships with girls. (p. 45)

After they presented their sections and the applicable assumptions to the class, the students wrote about which one assumption they most strongly agreed with and disagreed with.

Most of the students chose the second assumption with which they disagreed, but for reasons that actually supported the assumption. For instance, Raymond wrote, “Most boys are not sexist and homophobic…for the most part, society pushes boys to say they are sexist and homophobic. Deep down when boys actually think about it, they don’t mind gays, [but] they may find them annoying.” Stokely also said he disagreed that most boys were sexist and homophobic but then acknowledged, “I do see many derogatory terms and statements, but it’s mostly just a joke.” This observation actually supported Ricky’s agreement with the assumption: “I have witnessed boys in our school who are definitely homophobic and sexist. I feel that because we are at an all-guys school that most of us are indeed homophobic and sexist. I see more of us who are homophobic than sexist.” It was unclear from his response whether Ricky thought attending an all-boys school attracted homophobic and sexist students or created them, but the culture of othering I analyzed in Chapter 4 suggests the latter. Billy’s response in agreement with statement #2 was particularly honest and telling:
Boys think of girls being at a much lower level than boys. This belief comes up the most with sports. At track meets, I hear people saying that girls are worse than boys simply because they are female. When boys think of chores around the house, they think of women. When hunting or wrestling comes up, boys think of men. Boys are homophobic because they think that being gay is embarrassing. One of the things that boys think about most is acquiring women. Liking guys is something that boys think is so weird that they would never want to be called homosexual. Boys often say “no homo” after something if they really worry about what other people think of them.

Here, while Billy acknowledged that he agreed with statement #2 by virtue of choosing it to write about, unlike the other students who wrote about this, he wrote almost exclusively in the third person, as if to merely report what he had noticed and distance himself from the boys who thought and acted this way, an example of the implicit othering I described in Chapter 4.

Given the othering of women and gay men that was part of St. Albert’s culture, the students’ comments did not Surprise me. These comments indicated how the larger culture of the school, analyzed in detail in Chapter 4, shaped our constructions of gender in the English classroom.

In contrast, a small number of students also chose to write about statements #7 and #8. However, because these statements relate directly to some of the research on single-sex schooling I highlighted in Chapter 2, and since every student who responded to these assumptions disagreed with them, their responses are worth noting. While I was encouraged by their vehement disagreement with these statements, their refutations did not convince me that the assumptions are invalid. In fact, when I gave my students the packet labeled, “Simply… Understanding Boys,” Chris asked immediately why they
were reading this because they already knew about what boys thought because they were boys, and it would be more appropriate to learn about women. Billy said, “We should know what girls think, too.” When I asked, “Do you know how girls think?” Dane laughed and said, “I have no idea.” The idea in this exchange actually supported, rather than contested the assumption in statement #7 that boys “do not understand [girls] because they are not encouraged to do so.” Likewise, when expressing disagreement with statement #8, Billy claimed, “The fact that we don’t interact with girls during the school day always keeps relationships fresh,” as though girls were more of a commodity to St. Albert’s students since they do not see any during the school day. Billy’s “absence makes the heart grow fonder” reasoning is hardly a ringing endorsement that single-sex education does, in fact, help boys develop more positive relationships with girls.

Some boys also wrote about statements #1 and #4. Taken together, these assumptions, and the fact that most students who selected them agreed, suggest that the students felt societal pressure to conform to hegemonic masculinity and did not feel empowered to change those expectations. Though many wrote similar sentiments in their disagreements with both statements, Raymond stated it best in his disagreement with assumption 1: “People expect us to be tough and rigid and not cry and not be emotional. However, sometimes guys really do need to be emotional and vulnerable.” It seemed clear to me that the students needed more safe spaces and curricular opportunities to write and talk about these vulnerabilities.
The fact that our English classroom provided this kind of space was never clearer to me than in a class that occurred a month after the *Herland* unit ended. Topher came to class annoyed, and when I pressed him about why, he revealed that there was a student in his previous class who had been giving him (and apparently others) inappropriate notes with sexual undertones. Because the student was openly gay, Topher did not feel he could do anything about it because he would be labeled homophobic. The other students confirmed the note-writer did such things often, and when I asked whether they had ever reported him to a teacher, the class said that teachers didn’t know what to do about him, so they did nothing and told the kids to ignore him. This troubled me because sexual harassment is sexual harassment regardless of the perpetrator’s sexual orientation, and the impression the students had that the teachers did nothing about it was unfortunate, whether their impression was true or not. I told them they needed to save such notes and report him. However, citing the prevailing brotherhood code, the students maintained that they would not rat out another student. I told them they had to report it or it would not change. Topher said, “All right.” I then said, “Give the note to me next time and I’ll take it from there.”

After class, I looked up who the offending student’s English teacher was, thinking I could get that person’s read on the student to confirm my students’ stories. When I asked how she would describe the student, she said, “flamboyant, not sensitive to limits.” This conversation occurred in the teacher workroom with three male teachers present who all agreed that the boys would never come into their classes and tell them that a gay
student had been sending them notes. Rather than acknowledging I had a different relationship with my students than they did, they suggested that my students told me the story to get a rise out of me and play on my sympathies. When I asked Topher in his final interview if he would have told a male teacher, he replied, “I don’t know. I feel like…I wouldn’t say it to another female teacher, either. It’s just your personality, like you can definitely accept things. Like we can tell you stuff we can’t tell other teachers, I feel like.” While my individual personality may have encouraged students to share the situation with me, I also suspect that having just finished a unit about gender issues had something to do with this, especially since the sexual harassment had occurred on and off all year, and the students had never mentioned it prior to the unit.

**Gendered Personas Influenced by Homosocial Space**

Though the *Herland* unit provided a safe classroom space to talk about gender issues, unfortunately, most students often took advantage of the safe classroom space I sought to create – and I let them – by adopting personas that perpetuated the hegemonic gender order I was seeking to disrupt with the unit. Thus, I felt the successes of the unit were in some ways negated. These personas often resembled caricatures of the stereotypical man – an aggressive, somewhat insensitive “ladies’ man” – ironically consistent with Terry’s character, whom most despised and had disassociated with by the end of reading *Herland*. These gendered identities the students and I enacted in the classroom space also contradicted the multi-faceted, more sensitive and aware people we showed ourselves to be in smaller settings (i.e., my interviews with students) or in the
writing assignments whose excerpts I shared above. The gendered interactions I refer to did not occur in one particular episode or lesson activity, but rather happened subtly throughout the unit (and, in reality, our entire school year) and could be best organized in two categories: one-upping and performing for each other, and one-upping and performing for me. Such gender performativity often made the laidback culture the students frequently said they enjoyed about our class resemble a locker room where the students felt free to say whatever they wanted without limits. While the data are rife with examples of these phenomena, I provide just a few here, drawn from classroom discussions and my teacher journal.

**One-upping and performing for each other.** Instances of students adopting a macho identity to secure what I call their “manhood membership,” typically involved them hinting at their desirability with girls, putting down classmates’ popularity with girls, and making general sexual comments, much like *Herland*’s Terry. Here, the concept of precarious manhood (Vandello & Bosson, 2013) that I discussed in Chapter 2 proves useful. If we understand manhood to be a tenuous state that men constantly need to work for and protect, and if other men are the ones who grant manhood membership, then the male students probably considered each other the gatekeepers of manhood and positioned themselves to gain and/or maintain their precarious manhood membership. To do this, they asserted their masculinity by eschewing anything feminine, displaying their sexual desirability and putting down others’.
A case where a student touted his own desirability occurred on the very first day of the *Herland* unit. I asked Topher if he wanted to take his jacket off since the heat in our room was not well regulated, and it was particularly warm that day. I told him, “You must be hot,” and he replied, “I was born hot – taking off the coat is not going to help.” Rather than challenge his comment or give him a disapproving look, I made a joke of it and said, “That ties in nicely with what we are going to do today,” as we were about to listen to Lady Gaga’s “Born This Way” to start talking about biological essentialism.

Later, a student singled out another boy as not popular with women while asserting the rest of the class was. When we were talking about *Herland*, Jason posed an insightful question by asking how the story would change if it was about an all-male society with female explorers. To suggest women explorers would attract more attention than *Herland*’s men, Chris offered a comparison to St. Albert’s, “Whenever girls come on our campus, like if it’s a class change or after school, all you hear is ‘GIRLSSSSS!!!!!!!’” Carter quipped, “Yeah, but we don’t live without girls…well, you might…” and the class erupted in hollers. Considering the exchange as playful banter between friends, I did not acknowledge the jab and moved on with the lesson by returning to Jason’s question.

The comments of a more general, sexualized variety often came in the form of word play and innuendo that more than one student joined in on. For instance, when reviewing the assumption about single-sex schooling’s detrimental effects on boys’ relationships with girls, Billy uttered to Carter, “Boys from single-sex schools are more
likely to get it in,” referring explicitly to sexual intercourse. When Carter repeated the comment for the class’s benefit, he prefaced it by saying Billy had made a “vulgar, sexual remark.” Not usually one to engage in such dialogue, Billy was embarrassed and tried to backtrack, saying he meant “get in,” as in “to college,” but it was clear that was not his original remark, and I pointed out he could have avoided the whole ordeal by not speaking out of turn. One point to emphasize here is that when these comments were made, I – as the teacher – did not explicitly call the students out on their remarks. In the first instance, I made a joke of the remark, and in the second example, I ignored it. Because Billy was not a “regular offender,” though, I wanted to squelch any thoughts he had of becoming one, so I did address him about his joke. In Chapter 6, I give further insight into my reactions to such comments.

One-upping and performing for me. In trying to assert their physical prowess, presumably for each other to appear manly, the students hinted that they deemed themselves better than women, and therefore, me. They tried to assert their perceived physical advantage over me directly by intimidation, and they used derogatory sexist terms in classroom discourse to indirectly assert their privileged status as men. On one occasion, 10 minutes into class, Carter was inexplicably pacing the front of the room close to my desk when students should have been writing, and I told him to sit down because he was making me nervous. Shortly after, the class discussion turned to the fact that Herland’s women would not let the men go home. Carter asked if the women had weapons, and when I told him no, but that the guard ratio was 5 women to 1 man, he
started punching his hand and said, “If any girl came up to me, I’d just (punches hand). I
would hit a girl!” Topher diffused the situation by joking that the women might truly be
maneaters, holding the men captive to fatten them up for a cannibalistic feast. In
hindsight, I wondered if I empowered Carter by telling him he was making me nervous,
and therefore encouraged him to continue with this intimidation with the comment that he
“would hit a girl.” To be clear, I did not consciously feel intimidated, however, the fact
that I did not frequently challenge my students’ inappropriate comments suggests that I
was more fearful of them than I registered at the time.

Later in the unit, the conversation turned to rape, in response to the character
Terry sexually attacking his new Herland wife toward the end of the novella, resulting in
his banishment from the land. There was some confusion about whether the event was
truly an attempted rape, because that word was never actually used in the text, so we
reread the passage as a class. Afterward, right before the lunch bell rang, I asked, “What
would you imagine it means, then, when it says he wants to master his woman by sheer,
brute force by hiding in her bedroom that night? What would that mean to you?” On the
way out the door for lunch, Chris appeared to be quoting a movie line when he said to
Billy, “Do you see what she’s wearing? All purple! She’s asking to be raped!”
However, given that I was wearing all purple that day and the students know it is my
favorite color, I could not help but wonder whether the supposed movie quote was a truly
innocent remark. I return to this event in Chapter 6 when I analyze my role in the
classroom, but this situation was similar to when Carter physically intimidated me. I did
not register the comment as threatening at the time, but my lack of follow-up suggests I was, in fact, fearful, if not of Chris himself, than of how he might justify his remarks.

Students’ derogatory language was never directed at me, but because it was sexist in nature, it could be construed as a more subconscious, insidious way in which the students tried to gain dominance. For instance, once the class’s impression of Terry started to turn away from admiration, one student referred to him as a “douche,” and another called him a “bitch.” The students were talking out of turn, and the comments came one after the other, so when I asked them to repeat what they had said, one muttered, “A female dog,” and I let it go. Their use of these degrading, sexist terms only further served to draw the gendered line in the sand and separate us – I was constructed as a “female teacher,” if not a “female dog,” and they were constructed as men by virtue of using adult language and not being female.

I analyze my complicity in encounters like these more thoroughly in Chapter 6. Here it is important to note that while I deemed this behavior problematic, I never perceived the student’s comments as challenges to my authority nor did I feel threatened, even with the more overtly intimidating comments. However, just because I chose not to view them that way (or was conditioned not to, as I explain in Chapter 6) does not mean that was not the students’ intent. Interestingly, though I did not realize it in the moment, in replaying the classroom recordings and rereading the discussion transcripts, I noticed that when such comments as I describe here were particularly excessive, the following
class was inevitably more teacher-driven and lecture-based, and the reading quizzes I designed were harder.

Though tossing principles of feminist pedagogy to the side and adopting a more authoritarian role was not a conscious decision I made, nor was it a role I enjoyed (I made frequent notations in my journal about class being too teacher-driven), I now see it as my way of reasserting myself to the class, as though I needed to one-up them to prove I knew the material better than they did to reclaim my power in the room. Unfortunately, as Keddie (2008b) notes, such a stance can backfire: “Excessively authoritarian teacher relations tend to affirm, and indeed, exacerbate boys’ take up of dominant constructions of masculinity while more democratic relations that afford students greater autonomy over their behavior defuse such take up” (p. 349). Here, I faced a conundrum. Feminist pedagogy involves the teacher sharing the power with her students: covering material and topics typically ignored by traditional, patriarchal curriculum, building the classroom community by honoring the diverse voices students bring, and challenging traditional constructions of knowledge. However, in the settings described above, these pedagogical principles empowered the students too much so that my classroom became, at times, an extension of the locker room and thus perpetuated the very gender order I sought to interrupt. In this way, my classroom experience was similar to Ellsworth’s (1989), who questioned whether this kind of pedagogy was actually “empowering” when it actually “produced results that were not only unhelpful, but actually exacerbated the very
conditions we were trying to work against, including Eurocentrism, racism, sexism, classism, and ‘baking education’” (p. 298).

These classroom interactions help contribute to the theoretical framework I outlined in Chapter 2. While Connell’s (2000) work on the hegemonic gender order is a helpful starting point, as I noted earlier, this framework does not account for women’s roles in reinforcing or challenging the gender order. Schippers (2007) asserts that one must look at the interactions of femininities and masculinities when considering how gender hegemony plays out in certain contexts, paying careful attention to which practices are disruptive to the hegemony. To use the inverse of Connell’s terms, in the context of this classroom, I enacted hegemonic femininity, complicit femininity, and subordinate femininity. Schippers (2007) defines hegemonic femininity as consisting “of the characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (p. 94). By keeping silent during my students’ manhood membership negotiations, I condoned their casting of each other in the role of the gatekeeper to manhood and unwittingly accepted the position of the lone female in the room around which my students positioned themselves (physically and metaphorically). Thus, by my silence, I was embodying hegemonic femininity by guaranteeing their dominant position.

Complicit femininity, like complicit masculinity, is a position in the gender order in which one draws the benefits from the hegemonic gender order even if one does not
adhere to or appreciate it. For instance, being the recipient of a chivalrous gesture would be an enactment of complicit femininity, as would taking advantage of a maternity leave, especially if such a leave is not afford to men (At St. Albert’s, such a paid leave was available to both sexes).

Subordinate femininity, then, consists of behaviors that serve to disrupt the hegemonic gender order, such as asserting oneself in an authoritative way. As I noted, I occasionally entertained this position, often subconsciously after I felt the students had tried to assert their power over me. It always left me feeling uncomfortable, yet to truly disrupt the hegemonic order in place, maybe I should have enacted this position of femininity more often.

**Multiple Masculinities: The Focal Students**

In this section, I focus in on four particular students’ journeys through the unit to illuminate some of the concepts I have mentioned in more detail and introduce salient points that the other data sources did not capture as well. In interviewing these students and looking more closely at their work, I aimed to document their experiences of the gender unit in terms of their own biographies and how they were understanding the concepts we discussed. These cases illustrate the varied masculinities students brought to the classroom; yet, as the exchanges I have noted thus far indicate, students often shed these complex personas and adopted different, less nuanced ones when they came to our classroom. As noted earlier, in selecting these students, I aimed for the variety of masculinities Connell (2005) identifies, and I considered practical matters, such as which
students consistently completed their work, had regular attendance, and the schedule flexibility to meet for interviews. Given the concepts I have championed thus far, it may seem strange for me to categorize these focal students so crudely, but I do so purposely. While Connell’s multiple masculinities model is flawed, as I will explain after the cases, it does serve as a helpful starting point, and relying on the model did ensure I talked to four very different students. I interviewed the students three times over the course of three months for this study: before the unit, during the unit, and after. In this section, I draw from the interview transcripts, their written work and contributions to class discussions, and my teacher journal to present these mini case studies, noting findings specific to each case as well as those shared across all four.

Chris: “The Hegemonic Male”

Chris fits the stereotype of a boy I would have advised against attending St. Albert’s. From class discussions, I knew his father played a major role in his life and that both his dad and his older brother had graduated from St. Albert’s. In my experience, the boys who struggled at the school, particularly with female teachers, were the ones who came from homes with all boys and traditional family structures, where, even if the mother worked, it was still the dad who made the decisions and ruled the house. In short, from my perspective, sending a boy who came from a male-dominated household to an all-boys school did nothing to challenge the gendered assumptions he might have already developed. However, part of the reason I selected Chris to interview was because he represented a paradox. On the one hand, he was an assertive, outspoken athlete who
liked to “mess with” the boys around him by hiding their water bottles and locking them out of their phones. On the other hand, he was respectful in class by not crossing boundaries as some of his classmates did, and he showed a sensitive side by bonding with a little girl with cerebral palsy on a service trip before we started our interviews, frequently showing me pictures of her snuggling in his lap at church.

Chris’s course work and interviews confirmed my categorization of him as a hegemonic male in that he displayed views conducive to a dominant gender order. In the class exercise where students worked with a passage stripped of pronouns, Chris supplied feminine pronouns for characters that were naïve or did not like sports or outdoor activities, and masculine ones for characters that were competitive or who put down and swindled others. After reading “An Unnatural Mother,” Chris readily took up the gossips’ point of view and deemed Esther an unfit mother, even after our discussion pointing out how Esther’s heroism had saved her child and 1,500 other villagers. Not surprisingly, he identified most strongly with Terry’s character in *Herland*, and even when most class members changed their minds midway through the novella, Chris did not jump on the Terry-hating bandwagon. Although he had changed his character identification to Jeff by the end of the novella, he did not point to any of Terry’s shortcomings as his reason for doing so, and instead focused solely on Jeff’s open mindedness. In addition, Chris had extreme difficulty with the two writing assignments that required him to adopt a woman’s point of view. In fact, he wrote so little for the quick write prompt asking him to report on an explorer as though he were that explorer’s
assigned female tutor, he opted not to submit the exercise, instead receiving no credit.
Likewise Chris struggled so much with the creative writing assignment that had very loose guidelines about writing from the perspective of one of the female guides and give her reading of an event from the book that he turned that assignment in well over a week late. These assignments were uncharacteristic of Chris’s work ethic, as he was otherwise a motivated student who maintained a solid B average with seeming ease.

In many ways, Chris reinforced his role as the stereotypical male and confirmed Vandello and Bosson’s (2013) notion of precarious manhood in his interviews. In our first interview, Chris displayed his competitive streak immediately. Not only was “competitive” the first word that quickly came to mind when I asked how he would describe St. Albert’s to others, but he also spoke about sports extensively, mentioning in a later interview:

> Coming in, I was scoping everyone out that first [academic quarter]—up until hockey try-outs…the second [another student] opened his mouth, I would be like, “Who is he? What does he want? What’s his goals? What’s he doing?” That’s just what I did. And then, when it came to try-outs, I just kind of, “I’m nobody’s friend.” I didn’t want to make friends until then because I didn’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings, I guess, and I’m going to play how I’m going to play and get out of the way, I guess.

Drawing on the idea that manhood is precarious, it seems clear that Chris wasn’t just sizing up other students to determine whether they were a threat to the coveted spots on the hockey roster, but also to figure out whether they would threaten his manhood membership, a much costlier endeavor.
Chris’s interviews also let me know that his father was a much more dominant figure in Chris’s life than I had suspected when I selected him to interview. In addition to the story Chris shared in class about his father and brother “giving him crap” for helping his mother in the kitchen, Chris mentioned that he would face strict sanctions at home if he were to get a manicure or his eyebrows waxed like Raymond did, presumably from his father given the earlier story he shared in class. Chris said:

I don’t really have a problem with [what Raymond does]. … I just find it funny because I know if I did that in my house I’d get heckled to no end. There’s no way I’d be able to do it more than once for sure, and if I did it once that would be the end of that.

His father’s desire to ensure Chris “acted like a man” might be tied to his awareness of appearances. At the time of the interview, Chris was considering transferring for sports, having recently been cut from the hockey team. In speaking about a specific school, Chris said:

My dad loves the schooling and the connections to college. He wants me to go just ’cuz it’s an expensive school. He wants me to go to an expensive college and then just having the name and the good education to get me where I need to be for later on.

Chris’s dad’s concern with how his, and, perhaps by extension, his son’s status, appeared to others definitely affected Chris.

In all three interviews, Chris mentioned being hyper aware of how he appeared to others, from asking the kids he “messed with” to tell him if he was ever “going too far,” to not wanting to “sound ignorant” in class. More than any other student, Chris was attuned to contextual factors, acknowledging, unprompted, that he would act differently
around a group of girls than around a group of guys, and that he would act the same in “a group of black guys” as he would with “a group of straight guys,” but “different around the gay guys,” though he did not elaborate on how he would be different. Chris frequently cited how single-sex education allowed him to be himself because he got a break from having to worry about coming across well to girls. For instance, he said, “I wanna look like I’m smart, intelligent, and witty…and if I’m with my friends, they don’t really care…if there were girls here, we would have to think more about what we’re saying before we say it.” He enjoyed what he called the “laidback” atmosphere of our English class because it gave students space to be themselves, a sentiment each interview subject echoed.

It is worth noting that our first interview occurred just a week after Chris had learned he had been cut from the hockey team. In Vandello and Bosson’s (2013) extensive review of studies that support the notion of precarious manhood, they note, “momentary contextual features can temporarily heighten or quell men’s concerns about appearing manly” (p. 107). It is impossible to know to what extent Chris’s concerns about his masculinity were heightened with this unit following on the heels of being cut from the hockey team, but given how frequently he spoke about appearances, how tightly wound his masculine identity was to his role as a hockey player, and how deeply his father reinforced masculine ideals, it is reasonable to infer this change in status impacted Chris tremendously, as did his father’s dominating personality.
Dane: “The Complicit Male”

Dane and I had an easy rapport from the start of the year. One of the early writing assignments was a personal narrative, and Dane claimed it was the first time he had had the opportunity to write about his parents’ divorce, an opportunity he needed. My sympathetic comments on his paper clearly signaled I would be an understanding ear, as Dane continued to vent to me about life at home for the rest of the year. From these after-class conversations, I understood Dane to be more observant of the unjust gender order than his classmates and to have more egalitarian gender views than many of the St. Albert’s students I had encountered. Interestingly, though, I had also witnessed that he typically kept this more sensitive side to himself. For this reason, I thought of Dane as enacting complicit masculinity, which refers to the men who do not portray hegemonic masculinity but nevertheless gain advantages from an unjust gender order.

In many respects, Dane’s classwork was similar to Chris’s, and he, too displayed views conducive to a dominant gender order, but Dane’s work had two important differences. Unlike Chris, Dane did not have difficulty adopting a female perspective in his writing. Though his quick write response from the point of view of a female character was short, his creative writing assignment was insightful, as was his faux interview with Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the final quick write assignment of the unit. I attributed his ability to try on other gendered perspectives to his egalitarian gender views, which he displayed in each of his interviews. As with Chris, I suspect Dane’s family played a large part in shaping his gender views.
In Chapter 2, I presented Jolliff and Horne’s (1999) concept of mature masculinity, which men achieve by integrating feminine and masculine traits in a way that contributes to their well-being, independent of traditional gender roles. In other words, men embody mature masculinity when they feel truly free to act however they choose without gender role constraints. Throughout his interviews, Dane displayed thinking consistent with mature masculinity. He acknowledged that there were men who acted like stereotypical women and women who acted like stereotypical men, citing experiences with boys who liked to knit and girls who enjoyed playing football. He also pointed out the sexist thinking that motivated his religion teacher to portray abusive relationships as always being perpetrated by men: “It was always the girl getting beat on, never the guy…We never go into abusive girlfriends, and there are some.” He frequently hinted at the mirrored, androcentric curriculum at St. Albert’s as being detrimental, stating, “it’s a good idea [to include different viewpoints], and I think it keeps people more interested. Because if you’re reading a book about your life, it’s kind of like, ‘why am I reading this?’” Finally, he saw the value of having diverse teachers to offer different perspectives on subject matter, noting that a “white male with brown hair and blue eyes” teaching a course that deals a lot with race “is just kind of ironic.” Dane referenced our sexist society as well, noting, “All the politicians are guys making decisions for the United States, but half the United States is female,” and “Women are still looked down upon.”
Dane’s mature views were no doubt influenced by his close relationships with family members, whom he mentioned in each interview we had. Though he referred to his mom as “controlling” more than a few times, Dane’s anecdotes to illustrate her personality conveyed that he appreciated the care and attention she gave him. For instance, he spoke about one evening that he was out with friends and left his phone in the car while at a restaurant, and his mother had called and texted him multiple times. When he called her back, she was crying. He said, “I had to calm her down. I hung up and gave her five minutes and called her back,” an approach that suggests he understood her protectiveness and was not dismissive of it. Dane’s mother was an accomplished woman with a successful business career. Interestingly, Chris’s mother also held a top-level position at a law firm, but I learned this only when I explicitly asked him in our final interview what she did for work. Dane, on the other hand, mentioned his mother’s success frequently, and always unprompted. His close relationship with his mom was contrasted by his poor relationship with his father, whom he spoke about less, other than to note, “We fight all the time.” He also mentioned his cousins, some of whom were lesbian, others of whom were successful, straight artists whom people called gay given their artistic interests, a stereotype that Dane said “just pisses [him] off.”

While Dane’s thinking was consistent with mature masculinity, his course work, as I noted earlier, and contributions to class discussions were not, which is why I thought of him as embodying complicit masculinity. Dane did not fully succumb to the locker room culture I detailed above, and as I noted in Chapter 4, he was the one focal student
who rejected the notion of a St. Albert’s brotherhood. However, in Dane’s case it wasn’t what he did say in class but rather what he didn’t by exercising intentional silences. For instance, when discussing different genders and sexual orientations, he never shared the information about his lesbian cousins or the straight cousins considered gay. In our class conversations about the independent women of Herland, he never mentioned his mother or his equally successful aunts or grandmother. In fact, he revealed that he, too, had had his eyebrows waxed once but did not say anything in class when Raymond brought it up because, as he said, “I’m not stupid.” Just as Chris was hyper aware of appearances, Dane frequently talked about social forces influencing behavior. In our final interview, he succinctly stated, “You can’t really take away society, in a sense, because even if you’re with your family or you’re with your friends, they’re going to have a force on you.” In this case, the force of the homosocial classroom dynamic, which he liked because it was “laidback,” muted Dane’s public communication of his strong, but private, gender views.

Stokely: “The Marginalized Male”

Connell’s marginalized masculinity model acknowledges the interplay of gender with other structures such as race and class, and it was these other structures that I hoped to learn more about by choosing Stokely, who self-identified as Puerto Rican, as an interview subject. Stokely was one of two non-dominant students in my class, and, out of all the communities from which St. Albert’s drew, his represented a lower socio-economic area. Stokely often borrowed his books from the library rather than purchasing
them, and his older model iPhone with a cracked screen he couldn’t afford to replace indicated that finances were tight; in our first interview, he told me he attended St. Albert’s because it was the only school to offer him a full scholarship, as it had to his older brothers. He had impressed me earlier in the year with his sophisticated creative writing, so much so that I called his parents to commend him. I later learned that English was a second language for his family, which consisted of eight people under one roof, including a stepfather whose employment status varied and his mother who attended college in the evenings. In the first interview, Stokely also told me he attended a single-sex middle school (grades 5-8), so he was entering his seventh year in an all-boys learning environment by the time he entered my class. He expressed extreme distaste for his strict middle school but conceded, “It straightens you out, though,” confirming the findings I outlined in Chapter 2 on the success of single-sex schooling for non-dominant populations.

Stokely’s work throughout the unit indicated a thoughtful student who went above and beyond what an assignment required; in fact, his grades were among the highest in the class. Though I often requested that students add textual references to their quick writes, Stokely was one of the few to actually do so. When students were required to present a skit to illustrate one of the theories of gender, and I hinted that the book was rife with examples upon which to base a scenario, Stokely and his partner were the only pairing to consult the text and bring in dialogue from the novella to demonstrate their understanding of the theory. Writing was one of his strengths; Stokely’s responses to
journal prompts and writing assignments almost always went beyond the expected page count and always left me wanting to read more. In his creative writing assignment, he highlighted *Herland*’s dystopic practices when he depicted a woman whose child was taken away from her because she was deemed unfit (a practice the women in the book talk about as though it is perfectly natural and acceptable). He wrote:

> She dropped to her knees crying, balled up in a fetal position as they carried her newborn child away. She took short inhales and paused to look up at us. “No matter who you say her mother is, she is always going to be my blood.”

Given how easily he could put himself in the women’s shoes, I was not surprised that he related best to Jeff, the character who assimilates to Herland effortlessly and remains there with his bride at the end of the novella.

Stokely chose his pseudonym for this study after civil rights activist Stokely Carmichael, and in keeping with his faux namesake, he mentioned race in every interview. He was the only student in class to ask early on what race the women in *Herland* were, and when we got to the one passage where Gilman identifies them as White, he acknowledged that he had pictured them as Native American due to their tribal spirit (The rest of the class assumed they were White.). Stokely was also the only focal student to mention two specific instances of racism on St. Albert’s campus. One occurred on his first day when the gym teacher told the class not to jump over the fence that lined the field’s perimeter, and a student looked at Stokely and his Hispanic friend and said, “You’d jump the fence; you’re Mexican.” In our first interview, he recalled a stark awareness of himself as a minority when he came to St. Albert’s because his
previous school had been entirely Hispanic. He said, “After I came here, I really saw, like, okay, in reality, we’re the minority.” In fact, as a female teacher, I found a kindred spirit of sorts in Stokely as a fellow minority, albeit in a different category, and our interviews suggested mutually beneficial exchanges on how our status as Others affected our viewpoints. For instance, at the end of our first interview, Stokely said he thought race played a bigger role than sex in affecting someone’s point of view because women don’t wake up everyday and say, “Oh, I’m a girl. My life is going to be worse because of this now,” whereas racial “minorities are more vulnerable for racism than women are for sexism.” In other words, Stokely believed that racial minorities (like him) internalized the racism they faced daily, unlike women who might acknowledge sexism but not let it alter their sense of self. Although I thought racism and sexism were equally detrimental, I was inclined to agree with Stokely’s assessment when he explained his logic.

Stokely’s remark about internalizing racism and being vulnerable to its effects casts Stokely’s identification with Jeff in a new light. In speculating about Herland’s characters’ fates at St. Albert’s, Stokely said Jeff would “not be so cool” and would not belong to any specific group – in essence, he would be an outsider. When I clarified whether that was how he also saw himself, he agreed. That he saw himself this way saddened me, but given his awareness of himself as a minority, the vulnerability he felt in the face of racism, and the fact that he could not remember reading any book that was not about White men, I probably should have expected him to see himself on the margins. In a similar vein, Stokely noted that he did not consider any St. Albert’s teachers as role
models. He could not elaborate on why, but I suspect the fact that there were no Hispanic teachers at St. Albert’s at the time of this study was a major factor. Stokely’s experience served as a reminder for me that the windows we offer on the world through the curriculum need to open up a variety of viewpoints, and gender is just one of many perspectives we need to consider.

**Topher: A Less Aware “Hegemonic Male”**

I selected Topher as the final focal student for this study given his outspokenness in class and the enigma I thought he presented. A middle child with an older brother and younger sister and the only person in his family to attend St. Albert’s, Topher came from a less traditional home in that his mother, who went by her maiden name, was a successful high-end real estate agent with her own business who made enough money to support the family, and his father was a stay-at-home dad who occasionally worked as a substitute teacher “for fun” simply because he loved kids. With his stocky, athletic build, he looked every bit the part of the jock, yet he also had a background in theater and regularly wowed the class with his acting abilities and expressive reading. Though he sometimes did not complete his class work, particularly at the height of football season, all of the assignments he did finish displayed astute insights. Through our interviews, I wanted to learn how he viewed the unit and his place in the class.

In many ways, Topher fit the criteria of hegemonic masculinity and shared some of Chris’s traits. In fact, his coursework revealed almost identical insights to Chris’s in that he, too, relied on stereotypes to assign gendered pronouns to characters, he concurred
that the Esther character was an unnatural mother, and he initially identified with Terry in *Herland* but later switched to Jeff. Unlike Chris, however, Topher was able to put himself in a female character’s mindset to complete those writing assignments, and his comprehension of the larger points Gilman made came toward the end of the unit as he wrote the critical paper. As a White, two-sport athlete, Topher carried himself with confidence, and others in the class seemed to defer to him when he spoke. Unlike Chris, though, Topher seemed unaware of his positionality in the room and regularly employed privileged silences throughout our private conversations. Whereas Chris admitted to sizing up his classmates to see how they compared to him, Topher came across as blissfully ignorant that differences among students existed. In describing the student body, he said, “I think everything’s all well and good. It’s definitely more of a peaceful environment and there’s less commotion [than at other schools]…it’s a school where there’s all different groups of kids that can just be at school in harmony.” Only when pressed at the end of our final interview did he admit, “I guess I might have a bias in saying that everything’s all well and good because I play sports and things like that.”

Similarly, Topher was the only focal student to say he believed in gender-blindness, claiming that people’s gender did not affect their perspective because “men and women both have different opinions and it’s not like they have opposite opinions according to gender. Women have separate opinions, and so do men have separate opinions.” Interestingly, he was the only focal student who did not mention race or class in any of our interviews, another example of the privileged silences he communicated,
implying that he occupied dominant positions in both categories, because he has never had to think about such issues.

Yet, despite Topher’s “free to be you and me” attitude, more than any other student in the class, he often went out of his way to assert his heterosexuality in class discussions. In addition to the one-upping comments I mentioned above, on one occasion, he mentioned liking Sofia Vergara from the TV show *Modern Family* for “obvious reasons,” referring, I assume, to her physical appearance. On another, he said that *Herland* character Terry would still be popular at St. Albert’s, even without the presence of girls, because there were some guys that you can just tell by looking at them that they’re “popular with the ladies,” and then offered himself as an example. These comments were often made with a smirk, suggesting Topher made them in jest, but the frequency with which he made this kind of comment in class indicated he was trying to accomplish more than just a good laugh.

However, in our interviews, Topher expressed having a hard time losing the regular contact he had with girls in a coed environment, implying that his class persona as a “ladies man” was not a role he played in class and not a reality. While he, too, said he enjoyed the laidback atmosphere of our class and the absence of girls because “you can be yourself more [because you’re] not worrying about being judged by a girl,” he also noted having more difficulty talking to girls the longer he attended St. Albert’s. He said, “I’ll be on Facebook and I’ll try to talk to a girl that I haven’t talked to in a while and you can’t even start a conversation because you don’t know what to talk about,” especially
because he did not have a shared school experience to use as a starting point. Perhaps because he felt the absence of girls more acutely than his classmates, Topher advocated for including more female voices in the curriculum, stating that his two favorite books were *Herland* and Jeannette Walls’s *The Glass Castle*, which he had read the year before. He also suggested the school engage in more coed activities, such as joining with other schools for service trips.

The concept of precarious manhood helps makes sense of Topher’s dichotomy of in-class versus out-of-class personas. If manhood is precarious, and one of the main ways Topher previously gained membership to manhood was via his ability to attract and interact with girls, then attending an all-male school like St. Albert’s put that membership in question, and he had to find other ways to renew it. Participating in sports was one of the avenues he pursued to do this; his main reason for choosing to attend St. Albert’s was due to the prestige of its sports teams. However, unlike Chris, who hardly mentioned relationships with girls and whose sports career alone seemed to define his masculinity, for Topher, sports were clearly not enough to secure his position, so he relied of excessive heterosexual posturing in class to continually reinforce it.

**Insights Across the Mini Case Studies**

Two major themes were repeated across all four case studies: (1) the students’ enjoyment of the “laidback” atmosphere of our English classroom (and other classes like it), and the assertion that the casual nature of these classes gave them the freedom to express their “true” opinions without fear of judgment (from girls) or retribution (from
strict teachers); and (2) the important role friend and family relationships play in shaping students’ gendered self concepts.

As a teacher, I had mixed feelings about the students’ depiction of our classroom, and the school in general, as “laidback,” because that is not an adjective I associate with quality education. However, I found it difficult to argue with the outcome they claimed that kind of environment produced – freedom to share their opinions and be themselves – because that certainly is a description I connect to the feminist classroom I sought to establish. However, there is a fine line between being comfortable enough in class to take intellectual risks, and tossing all etiquette aside to extend the locker room subculture, and students frequently acted as though these were one and the same. Keddie’s (2008b) analysis of teacher collusion offers a warning to teachers working with male students. One of the male students she studied preferred “laidback” teachers who were “not too serious” because they didn’t “mind having a bit of a joke” (p. 350). However, the jokes he engaged in were often sexist and discriminatory in nature, and Keddie pointed out that teachers who gave too much freedom were often complicit in perpetuating an unjust gender order. My constant struggle at St. Albert’s, which I detail in the next chapter, was how to establish and police that boundary between students being comfortable and appropriate, and students taking that comfort level too far. As I show in the next chapter, in the class I have focused on here, I fear that I failed more often than I succeeded.

I also felt conflicted about the major role students’ family and friends played in their gendered development, noting in my teacher journal, “I get them for only an hour,
and not even everyday at that – parents and siblings and friends have them for so much more [time].” Returning to Postman’s (1979) notion of teaching as a thermostatic activity to make sure that our classrooms regulate the temperature of the ecology, in an all-male school that perpetuates hegemonic masculinity, a unit that offers alternate constructions of gender is particularly necessary. However, if the seeds it plants are not fostered outside the classroom, their growth will be limited.

Beyond highlighting the multi-faceted gendered personas these students brought to class, but then left at the door, the mini case studies also serve as a useful critique for Connell’s (2005) multiple masculinities model, which has been criticized for being too categorical and for not allowing for mobility between the various models. As Imms (2000) argues, “In short, multiple masculinity theory currently lacks an account of intramasculinity mobility” (p. 160). Bird’s (1996) findings on how different men were in homosocial environments than heterosocial ones were echoed in this study: “Nonhegemonic masculinities fail to influence structural gender arrangements significantly because their expression is either relegated to heterosocial settings or suppressed entirely” (p. 120). Topher concurred that he and his classmates presented themselves differently in the all-male classroom:

I mean, a lot of the times, I feel like kids say things just to try to be funny and cool but it’s just stupid…and just try to fit in. I feel they succumb to, like, a lot of the pressure around them…like they’re influenced by a lot of their friends, so I mean, I guess it just catches on, you know what I mean?

The difficult job of educators in these homosocial environments, then, should be to try to diffuse that pressure and encourage the Chrises, Danes, the Stokelys, and the Tophers in
our classrooms to bring their authentic selves to classroom discussions rather than check those personas at the schoolhouse door.
Chapter Six
Becoming the “Auntie” of His-land: Trading Power for Patronage

Topher (to Ms. McEachern): I’ll be your nephew.

Chris: If we call you Auntie, will that be better?

Topher: Can you adopt some of us as, like, your nephews?

Chris (to class): Call her Auntie.

In the previous chapters, I analyzed the gendered culture of the school and concentrated on my English classroom. Here, I zoom in on my own practice to examine the role I played in gender construction both in the school at large and in my own classroom. Drawing on the concepts I have detailed in previous chapters, I show the paradoxical relationship between my curricular choices, which became increasingly more feminist and inclusive, and my gendered interactions with my students and colleagues, which became increasingly less so, though there were variations in my degree of complicity with the existing gender order depending on the students and faculty I interacted with. I argue that I made these changes gradually over my tenure at St. Albert’s to adapt to the school culture I perceived, and community members affirmed these adaptations in various ways, from parental praise to students saying I was their favorite teacher, and electing to take additional classes with me.

This chapter primarily addresses two of the subquestions for this dissertation: As the classroom teacher, what role did I play in the construction of gender in my classroom via my pedagogy, and interactions and relationships with my students? How did the school culture shape the ways my students and I constructed gender? In answering these
questions, I speak to the larger research question: *How was gender constructed in the context of an English course at an all-boys Catholic secondary school?* As in the previous findings chapters, Erickson’s (1986) notion of “evidentiary warrant” guided the formation of this chapter’s argument, which I built from analyzing my course syllabi, reading lists, teacher journal, class discussions, and student interviews. The argument is graphically represented in Figure 6.1 below.

**Figure 6.1. Chapter 6’s main argument and supporting evidence**

As a way to adapt to the culture of St. Albert’s, during my tenure, I subconsciously became increasingly less complicit with the androcentric curriculum.

However, I also became increasingly more complicit in perpetuating St. Albert’s hegemonic gender order via my interactions with faculty and students.

Interestingly, my level of complicity was dependent on the students and faculty I was interacting with.
To present the argument detailed above, I rely on episodes and observations recorded in my teacher journal and classroom discussions.

**Changing My Curriculum Complicity**

In Chapter 5, I showed how androcentric St. Albert’s English curriculum was by analyzing the department’s book lists. The discovery that students were exposed to mainly male authors and characters did not surprise me, especially given the episode I recounted from my junior English class in 2005, when students were unable to name female American authors. However, I was surprised to learn that during my first two years of teaching at St. Albert’s, I did not teach a single major work authored by a woman (though I did include some short stories by women), and out of all the literature I assigned, only two pieces, Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* and Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, had female characters that played pivotal roles. Even in these classics, though, the female characters existed solely in relation to the males, a point Virginia Woolf lamented in her essay, *A Room of One’s Own*:

> All these relationships between women, I thought, rapidly recalling the splendid gallery of fictitious women, are too simple. So much has been left out, unattempted. And I tried to remember any case in the course of my reading where two women are represented as friends…They are confidantes, of course, in Racine and the Greek tragedies. They are now and then mothers and daughters. But almost without exception they are shown in their relation to men. It was strange to think that all the great women of fiction were, until Jane Austen’s day, not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex. (Woolf, 1957, p. 86)

In fact, though Curley’s wife in *Of Mice and Men* plays a major role and is the character who precipitates the unfortunate ending, she does not even have a first name, identified
solely in relation to her husband. Hermia and Helena, the young lovers in the overlapping love triangles with Lysander and Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, bicker over which one of the male characters loves them and then forgive and forget the men’s fickleness (although magically inspired) at the end when the couplings have been settled, suggesting that all’s well that ends with a boyfriend. I shudder to think what messages I conveyed to my students when these were the only women we spent significant class time discussing, especially since I did not invite my students to recognize the passive roles the characters played nor explore the significance of that passivity because I hardly noticed it myself.

After teaching my freshmen *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* for two years, I eventually switched to the more male-dominated *Julius Caesar* at the advice of fellow freshmen teachers. Much to my dismay, the switch worked well. I wrote in my teaching journal:

As much as I want to further the voices of women in the classroom by choosing texts by female authors and with female protagonists, the students really do respond to material about masculinity. I am reminded of several conversations I had with fellow English department members on which Shakespearean play to do with my freshmen. Having taught *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* rather successfully to 7th graders for two years before I came to St. Albert’s, I continued with that play for my first two years here. It worked, but admittedly not as well [as in the previous coed classroom]. I had the occasional student who was reluctant to read the girls’ parts, but generally, that wasn’t the issue. The discussion of fairies and the fickleness of teen love and hypocrisy of adults just didn’t work as well without female voices in the room. Most of my colleagues taught *Julius Caesar*, even though many of them said they personally did not like the play as much as our other Shakespeare options, because “the boys really respond to it.”

I switched, and I understood their comments. The deceit, the backstabbing friends, the quest for power, not to mention the gory stabbing of Caesar, were
right up their alleys. I have taught the play ever since. Certainly the work itself is important, but how we teach it and what we highlight is perhaps just as crucial. With Caesar, I have always highlighted Portia and Calpurnia’s roles, especially the scene between Brutus and Portia when she demands to know what is occupying Brutus, citing that she is his other half, not his whore, and is strong enough to take what troubles him. But there is only so much you can do in a play with just two female characters with minimal scenes.

This entry documents a constant tension I had felt at St. Albert’s, and perhaps echoes one felt by teachers in general, of wanting to teach works that students respond to but also not wanting to let students’ preferences dictate the curriculum, especially when those preferences seem to favor an unbalanced program like the male-centered one at St. Albert’s. In addition to my familiarity with A Midsummer Night’s Dream, I chose the play because sophomore year English focused on tragedy, and many of the Shakespearean plays on the senior syllabi were also tragedies; I thought reading one of Shakespeare’s comedies would serve as an appropriate complement. The entry also highlights the subconscious actions I took to mitigate what I perceived might be the negative effects of switching from a fanciful comedy that featured female characters prominently to a more masculine text whose female characters have far fewer lines, though they are the most intelligent and cognizant of the ensemble cast. In a way, I assuaged my own guilt over “giving in” to the students’ interests by focusing on the stronger female personalities in the play, even though, again, these characters still “are shown in their relation to men” (Woolf, 1957, p. 86).

Though my switch to Julius Caesar suggests I embraced androcentric literature, I actually began to move away from the typical White male curriculum and toward a more
balanced, inclusive one when I enrolled in a master’s degree program whose students were other English teachers from all over the country. Listening to their conversations and reading their shared lesson plans, I recognized their syllabi, book lists, and assignments reflected a much worldlier perspective than did mine. Spending two summers with such a varied student population engaged in intensive coursework that encouraged me to reconsider the value of reading and writing and apply my philosophies to my curriculum choices opened my eyes. Although more informal than the practitioner inquiry study I conducted here, my master’s program provided me the first opportunity to take a step back and look at what I was doing in the classroom. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) state:

> By conducting inquiry on their own practices, teachers identify discrepancies between their theories of practice and their practices, between their own practices and those of others in their schools, and between their ongoing assumptions about what is going on in their classrooms and their more distanced and retrospective interpretations. (p. 51)

Armed with these new perspectives, I returned to St. Albert’s with a master’s degree and more confidence to change what I identified as the deficiencies in the curriculum.

Toward the end of my program in 2006, I wrote:

> For three days after the school year ended, members of my department gathered for a discussion of our reading curriculum. St. Albert’s prides itself on its rigorous, traditional curriculum. Such a program does not lend itself to minority voices, and I pointed this shortcoming out after we passed around everyone’s reading lists. Where were the women authors? The strong, black voices? Pieces of valued world literature? One teacher whose list was more heavily concentrated on these voices agreed that we need to do a better job and make more of a conscious effort to include such works in our classroom. Another teacher, perhaps the most traditional of the bunch, said, “I see your point, but we have to teach the classics. Reading contemporary pieces is about as satisfying as smoking
a cigarette,” by which I think she meant the experience is enjoyable while it lasts, but there’s no long lasting (positive) effect. I suppose her comment could also be taken to equate contemporary titles—Oprah’s book club selections, for example—as “guilty pleasures” that we an English teachers know are “bad” and have “little value” but sometimes enjoy as a needed break from the “real work” that is reading, say, Paradise Lost. In the end, a couple works were added as “options” to the curriculum, but none of the perspectives I advocated for made it to the list of required texts.

This excerpt shows that while I spoke up in the department meeting and had one department member’s support, the prevailing opinion was that the traditional literary canon held the most merit and contained the works we ought to be teaching our students. As a result, I proceeded slowly and rather quietly with my alterations. First I added more multicultural texts, such as a unit on Jewish and Holocaust literature to tie into a Holocaust survivor’s campus visit. Then I supplemented the curriculum with weekly current events articles, often told from a feminist perspective. Finally, I incorporated more female characters and voices, such as Ayn Rand’s Anthem, Barbara Ehrenreich’s nonfiction Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America, and, more recently, Alice Bliss, a local female author’s coming-of-age story about a girl whose father is deployed to Iraq.

As with the unit on Herland that I described in the previous chapter, the students typically did not offer resistance, but any opposition I did receive came exclusively from the upperclassmen. In one junior class I taught prior to this study, a student showed a video clip questioning why The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn was considered a masterpiece despite the poor grammar characters used when works by black authors were discounted from the canon for the same reason. We got into a lively discussion over why
certain voices were privileged over others, and when I mentioned the lack of female
writers in the literary canon, one student supported the exclusion. I recounted the class
discussion in my teacher journal after the class ended:

“Of course [men make up the canon] – men are more interesting,” Dave said. I
asked him to repeat his comment, but with a smile on my face, somewhat
incredulous he had just said that. He then added, “I’d rather read about a man
than a pregnant girl.” [A reference to Plainsong, which students had read the year
before.]

Another student, Aidan, goaded me further by saying, “Yeah, no one
wants to read about the perspective of women because all they can talk about is
the kitchen.” He smiled.

Shocked, I somewhat jokingly told him I was considering taking off my
shoe and beating him with it. He smiled.

Other members of the class joined in, talking about how boring it is to
read about women – who would want to read a book about women cooking and
cleaning and taking care of kids? How boring. I was somewhat floored. This
was such a stereotypical conversation that I was somewhat shocked that it actually
happened.

Dave, said, “I could tell you so many jokes about women.”

I questioned why he would tell me that, and I asked if he also thought it
was appropriate to share racist jokes (to tie back to the original conversation about
Huck Finn).

Dave smiled and said no, of course not. Someone else added that there
aren’t that many funny jokes about blacks. Dave explained, “Well, it’s different.
Race is what they’re born with.” I point out that I am a woman and I can’t change
that – well I can – but Mike’s point is that I can choose not to be the stereotypical
woman about whom jokes are made.

Though this is one event, the sentiments the class expressed with these comments were
similar to others I had heard from upperclassmen over the years. I have no doubt the
students were joking and trying to get a reaction from me, but I have never had such a
response from underclassmen. They may have been less than enthusiastic to read Alice
Bliss, especially given the title and feminine-looking cover, but none of them ever
verbalized their misgivings in the public forum of the classroom. In fact, in creative
writing assignments, I never had an upperclassman choose a female narrator for his story, but without fail, a handful of freshmen did so every year. This classroom example also helps illuminate the paradox I explain in this chapter, which is that while my curriculum became more overtly feminist, my actions became less so. I believe one of the reasons I embraced a more relaxed attitude in class, allowing sexist comments to slide without reproach, or responding to them with a smile and a joke as I did in this example, was because I subconsciously wanted to make my inclusion of feminist works more palatable, as though perhaps students would be more likely to accept and enjoy feminist literature if it were not taught by a feminist. Dave’s point was well-taken; I might have been born a woman, but I could choose what type of woman I wanted to be (at St. Albert’s).

**Changing My Interactional Complicity**

My experience at St. Albert’s was that there were generally two extreme types of teachers: those whom the students revered (and therefore were looked upon favorably by parents and administration), and those whom the students tolerated or even despised (and therefore were often the subject of parental complaints and administrative intervention). Few teachers fell in the middle of this spectrum. I formed this impression early during my tenure, and though gender was not a distinguishing factor between the two categories, it seemed to me that the community was quicker to classify men in the former group than they were the women. In other words, women had to work harder to be student favorites than the men did. While teaching is not a popularity contest, when students like their teachers, they are less likely to complain about the grades they earn and more likely to be
engaged in those classes and overlook those teachers’ mistakes (Dee, 2007), which results in fewer, if any, challenges with parents and administration, and contributes to the overall favorable reputation of those teachers.

My interactions with parents and school counselors confirmed these impressions, as did the interviews with faculty I cited in Chapter 4, wherein every faculty member I spoke to acknowledged that female teachers had it harder at the school. At the first St. Albert’s graduation I attended as a teacher, three students delivered speeches, and all the teachers they credited with their successes were men. Thinking it might have been a fluke, female colleagues and I started tallying how often women teachers were named during such occasions. As recently as the faculty/staff appreciation lunch the year after this study took place, a father gave a welcoming speech as the head of the Parent’s Council. In it, he named all the inspirational teachers his senior son had had over the last four years, listing specific ways each teacher had mentored and supported his child. All eight teachers he named were male, and such an account is typical of what I had heard repeated over the years. Even the yearbook reflected this preference for male faculty. Because only men were ever named in the Teacher Superlatives section (where students voted which teacher was the funniest, best dressed, most down to earth), in 2006, the adviser created both male and female categories for the recognitions to encourage students to acknowledge female faculty.
Still, when I arrived at St. Albert’s, I was a young teacher whose students were not that much younger, and I felt I needed to establish firm boundaries. As I noted in my teacher’s journal:

When I started teaching here in 2003, boys would not even think to make inappropriate comments in my class because I gave off more of an authoritarian presence. I felt I had to, to compensate for how close in age I was to them. I was stricter and adhered to classroom policies to a T in order to be the same as possible to my mentor colleague, who was not at all like me in style [the more traditional department member who likened non-canonical works to cigarettes in the example above]. It did not work well. I got the reputation of being a hard-ass, and not in a ‘she’s-hard-but-you-learn-so-much’ way, either.

As a result of my firm classroom presence, students challenged my authority in various ways outside the classroom, questioning how well I communicated assignments (though at the time I was one of the few faculty members who maintained a class website for such purposes) and how harshly I graded their work. I faced problems with parents, who occasionally sent me nasty emails questioning my grading policies, and school counselors deemed me unreasonable after hearing my students complain, even though I was only holding them accountable to the student handbook policies. In one such instance during my first year, a counselor called me in for a meeting with a student’s father, who was upset that I did not give his son homework credit because he failed to turn it in a week after his two-day absence. Ironically, this was one of the few times I had been more lenient with the student handbook policy, which stated that a student had one day for each day he was absent to make up work. During the conference, the father repeatedly told me I was being “cold” and “not very maternal” with his son, comments that had a sharper
point and felt more like a personal attack because I was visibly pregnant at the time, and the father’s expressions were uttered as he glanced at my protruding stomach.

These personal interactions play a pivotal role in understanding the dominant gender order of the school and how people challenged or condoned it, especially when applied to the subconscious choices I made. As Schwalbe and colleagues (2000) note, “the reproduction of inequality, even when it appears thoroughly institutionalized, ultimately depends on face-to-face interaction, which therefore must be studied as part of understanding the reproduction of inequality” (p. 420). According to these researchers, in organizations like St. Albert’s, people with subordinate status like me have three options: avoidance, collaboration with other subordinates, or acceptance (Schwalbe et al., 2000).

Having bought a house down the street after signing my contract and having had my second child at the start of my second year of employment, I was not in a financial position to leave my job, what Schwalbe et al. (2000) refer to with the option of avoidance. In fact, the researchers state:

“Dropping out” is [a] response to inequality that might, though need not always, reproduce it…Certainly the withdrawal of participation by people who are fed up with powerlessness and disrespect has the effect of allowing things to go on as they are…Certainly the withdrawal of dissident energy from the mainstream does little to threaten existing hierarchies. (pp. 429-430)

Sacrificing one’s wellbeing and happiness simply to “threaten existing hierarchies,” as Sara from Chapter 4 surely would have been doing had she chosen to stay, makes little sense, especially when one has other options, as Sara did. However, Schwalbe et al.’s
point about the cumulative effect people with “dissident energy” leaving can have on perpetuating oppressive structures is part of what motivated me not only to continue at St. Albert’s each year, but also eventually to apply for and accept the Assistant Principal role when it unexpectedly opened after this study was finished, even though it was not a job I initially wanted.

When I removed leaving St. Albert’s from my list of options, I was left with collaboration or acceptance, and I initially opted for the former. Earlier in this dissertation, I mentioned that female faculty formed a short-lived women’s group. Women met informally outside school, for a luncheon at someone’s house before the school year began, or for a drink at a local restaurant after a long school week. We shared war stories and provided affirmation for each other in ways we felt weren’t happening in our departments or the larger school setting. However, while such solidarity was helpful in that it “offer[ed] practical knowledge of how to get by, and also alternative criteria by which to judge one’s self competent, worthy, and successful” (Schwalbe et al., 2000, p. 428), this adaptive subculture ultimately had “a reproductive effect in part because [it] allow[ed] psychic needs to be met, despite subordination” (p. 428). In other words, turning to our female colleagues to justify our worth as professionals at St. Albert’s took the pressure off the larger school community to regularly communicate our value. It was institutional change that we ultimately wanted, but we were never going to achieve that by simply listening to and complimenting each
other over a glass of wine. In hindsight, perhaps people’s realizations of the group’s limitations caused its gradual demise.

The third option available to me, then, was to accept the hierarchical gender structure and my role in it, but this option came with a price, as Schwalbe and colleagues (2000) detail:

One way to adapt to subordinate status is to accept it, while seeking ways to derive compensatory benefits from relationships with members of the dominant group…In these cases, members of a subordinate gender group accept practices that demean and disempower them in exchange for a degree of approval and protection. (p. 426)

Unfortunately, I cannot pinpoint from my data sources when I made this shift. However, I suspect it occurred when I left my full-time position in 2007 to enter my doctoral program full-time and then returned in 2010 when I had finished my coursework.19 Throughout my doctoral studies, I explored issues related to gender and single-sex schooling, and I had decided to conduct a practitioner inquiry dissertation to bring my lingering questions back to the source. To do so, I needed the community’s support – students to participate in my project, parents to give their permission, and administration to approve the work. Because I had been missing from the school for three years, I was effectively given a clean slate among the students. Now a little older and a bit mellower, with more teaching experience and working toward a higher degree status, I could decide again whether to adopt the authoritarian approach that had not served me well the first time around, or to take my cues from the male faculty members the students so revered,

19 During this time, I dropped to part-time status, teaching the Journalism elective in a special before-school time slot.
the ones mentioned in the speeches whose classrooms and, I suspected, policies were more laidback. While I present this decision as a straightforward one, the choice was actually a subconscious selection on my part, but it is a shift I clearly made given the evidence from the data sources I have already presented, such as the silence and othering I engaged in and detailed in Chapter 4, and the often troubling classroom interactions I shared in Chapter 5.

At times, I acknowledged via my teacher journal how my more casual approach was problematic, and I questioned the larger repercussions my actions, or sometimes inactions, might have. Schwalbe et al. (2000) point out, “what is situationally adaptive for some members of a subordinate group…can be disadvantageous, on the whole, for other members of the same group” (p. 427) because it only serves to reproduce inequality. For instance, upon reflecting further on the incident I detailed above when my junior class jokingly claimed women could only write about cooking and cleaning, I noted:

In hindsight, smiling – even in shock – sent the wrong message because it gave them fuel to keep going. I probably sent the message that it was okay to continue down their sexist, ridiculous path because it’s all in “good fun” and we’re all “friends” here. I like having a comfortable environment in my classroom, one in which students can feel free to exchange ideas and know that I am someone they can talk to. I wonder if I react in this way to statements like these (my smiles, my making a somewhat joke in response) as a way to maintain that more casual, friendly atmosphere versus the reaction going on in my head – screaming at them and going into a rant on how these kinds of remarks are what stifles equality and continues to make women second class citizens – which is sure to lead to a stifled classroom where students are hesitant to say anything “off” for fear of setting me down another rant. Then I will get the reputation for being “that” teacher. Students will grumble. Administration will be suspicious. Doubts about my classroom management will fester. But maybe such rants are warranted. And
maybe my students being silenced in this way is a good thing; given the words coming out of their mouths, a bit of self-censoring might be just what the doctor ordered.

There is a fine line between giving students the space to explore gender issues, as I illustrated in Chapter 5, and giving students the space to be chauvinistic. This journal entry represents an earlier episode in my gradual shift toward complicit interactions, and it is important to note that I recognized the calm, joking persona I adopted in front of the classroom belied the strong misgivings I actually felt in wanting to scream at my students and go “into a rant.” As the entries continued, these recognitions of appearance versus reality were fewer and farther between, suggesting I gradually became less bothered by what I was experiencing.

The repeated messages I received that reinforced this change contributed to my move toward interactional complicity. Not only did the frequency with which parents challenged me significantly decrease, but they also started explicitly soliciting my professional opinion from matters such as where their son should apply to college, to what strategies I would recommend a student employ outside of class to improve his reading comprehension. I realize this change among the parents could be, and probably was, attributed to matters other than my complicit interactions with their sons and the school culture at large. As I acknowledged earlier, unlike when I started at St. Albert’s, I was now older, I had school-aged children and so could better relate to parents, and I had more teaching experience and a higher degree. I am certain these factors contributed to parents’ interactions with me. However, it is impossible to separate their sons’ positive
estimations of me from these other considerations, and I suspect these other aspects would have carried less weight with parents if, at the same time, their sons came home and complained about me. In this way, my “adaptive behavior [was] sufficiently rewarded to allow immediate psychic and material needs to be met – at the cost, however, of perpetuating a larger system of inequality” (Schwalbe et. al., 2000, p. 427) due to the sexist attitudes I often left unchallenged.

I do not mean to suggest that all of my students adored me, but it was not until I returned to the school full-time in 2010 that students started telling me how much they enjoyed my class and my “laidback” personality, as my focal students in Chapter 5 repeatedly called it. Though I have not yet been named in a Female Teacher Superlative category in the yearbook, nor have I ever been mentioned in one of those graduation speeches, I started receiving multiple “thank you” postcards at the end year with heartfelt messages. One student wrote:

Dear Mrs. McEachern,
I just want to thank you for all the times we had last year in English class. It was full of laughs, and I always had a great time. You made me love English even more than I did before, and I always appreciated the hello’s through the halls everyday at school. You gave me a new perspective on how to write and how to succeed at it. Thank you again.

Another said my class was the “best experience at St. Albert’s.” Perhaps the most indicative comments were from the juniors in this study, who started calling me “Auntie” halfway through *Herland*, a reference to one of the explorers’ comments that the women

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20 At the end of the school year, graduating members of the National Honor Society write “thank you” postcards to teachers they have had over the years. Every teacher receives at least one, but the sincerity and specificity of the note often varies, or at least it had for me.
he met reminded him of his aunts. This term of endearment, which they continued to use when they saw me the following year, was significant to me given what I noted in Chapter 4 about how students viewed male faculty as coaches, mentors, and big brothers, whereas the women were either mother figures or sex objects. An aunt is not in the same realm as a coach or a mentor, but it is certainly different from a mother or a sex object, so I had broken the mold.

In addition to these positive reinforcements, students consistently complained about other teachers who resembled my prior self, which encouraged my complicity. For instance, two of the students I interviewed for this project had Maeve, the young, Ivy-League educated teacher I mentioned in Chapter 4. In her interview, Maeve told me she felt she had to reassert her authority everyday, and she frequently challenged students on their sexist comments, giving detentions when boys uttered the phrase, “That’s what she said!” to point out a double-entendre, which happened frequently.²¹ In short, she resembled the teacher I was when I started at St. Albert’s, and my students’ comments about her in our interviews let me know such a personality was not welcome. Stokely simply said she was “a scary teacher.” Chris classified Maeve as someone who “wasn’t afraid to offend anyone,” which is ironic given the offensive behavior she told me she tried to squelch. Chris contrasted Maeve with a male teacher he connected with because he “liked the way he was not afraid to make a joke, and he wasn’t afraid to take a

²¹ This phrase, made popular by the movie Wayne’s World and television show The Office, was used to make a sexual joke. For example, a student might have talked about a homework problem and said, “I tried all night, but I couldn’t get it done,” and another student would chime, “That’s what she said!” to imply the first student was impotent.
joke…[they] could banter back and forth and it would be fun.” These messages justified my classroom persona change, as I learned it was easier to be the teacher students connected with and parents appreciated. In revising my tactics, however, I was “trading power for patronage” (Schwalbe et al., 2000, p. 426), engaging in silence and othering, as I described in Chapter 4, almost as a way to join the brotherhood, even while knowing it would always be out of my reach by virtue of my sex.

While I made references to my change in style multiple times in my teacher journal, one later entry about a junior class I taught a year before this study highlighted my change in thinking as well. I wrote:

These boys are more inclined to flirt with me [than the freshmen]. The other day, when I pointed out to Sam that his shirt was unbuttoned at least 5 deep, revealing his white t-shirt (putting him out of dress code), he said, “I am so hot right now, I’m thinking about taking it all off.” It was kind of funny. We all giggled a little. It was one of those moments where I think, “Only at a boys’ school…”

But I don’t think I say that phrase the way I used to. When students would try to flirt with me or misbehave in the past, my knee jerk reaction – my go-to reason was that it was because I was a woman and that such inappropriateness happens “only at a boys’ school” where being the woman somehow makes me an anomaly and, therefore, powerless. This time, and these days, I think “only at a boys’ school,” where I’m smirking and shaking my head in a way that is more like acceptance of “this is how things are here.” I am struggling to find when this shift occurred, as I certainly wouldn’t have had this reaction when I left my full-time duties at the school to pursue a full-time Ph.D. program. In fact, one of the reasons I entered the program was because I couldn’t see myself staying in the environment long-term, and I needed a degree that would give me more options. However, when my full-time coursework was done, and I returned to my full-time position, I wonder if I started looking at things with different glasses as a means for survival – as though I had to come up with a coping mechanism for professional security. Or…by that point, had I been away from the culture long enough that it didn’t bother me as much? Or, had I been a part of the culture for so long that it didn’t bother me as much…I had gotten used to it as my new norm?
I believe there is some truth to the notion that my change might have been the result of building up a tolerance such that I was more immune to the sexist undertones in my class, and thus more likely to condone them with my silence or smiles, as I saw a similar pattern of indoctrination in my students.

In thinking about the differences I observed between the under- and upperclassmen, I wrote:

I have long contended that there is a difference between freshmen and upperclassmen. When I arrived at the school, I taught 2 freshmen sections and 2 senior ones. The seniors were more at ease, more confrontational, quicker to take advantage of me (or at least I perceived it as such). The upperclassmen are also quick to dismiss the idea of going coed. The freshmen were, however, more “macho” in some ways, like they had to prove to others (and maybe themselves) that they weren’t gay just because they were at an all-boys school. They were in favor of having a coed school, missing the girls they shared classes with in middle school. So, it was an interesting dichotomy in that as students grew more comfortable with themselves, each other, and the school, they were in some ways more “feminized” – hugging each other in the halls, not feeling the need to live and breathe sports and put on a show for others – yet, in others, their sexist attitudes were more insidious (throwing around terms like “bitch” when speaking about female teachers, not respecting their authority as much as the male teachers). Some of my observations, I know, are colored by age and experience. But, I wonder, does being cut off from their public school, coed friendships make them “other” females more and more as the years go by? It’s as if the longer they spend in the environment, the more indoctrinated they get.

In short, my observations suggested that students entered the school with more egalitarian gender views, as evidenced by their desire for a coeducational school, their willingness to read more stereotypically feminine texts, and their respectful, typically nonexistent behavior in class. Yet in addition to their egalitarian views, freshmen presented themselves with a sense of machismo, as though to repel the “gay” label others applied to them for attending St. Albert’s and protect their precarious manhood (Vandello &
Bosson, 2013). As they progressed through the school, though, they changed. The upperclassmen seemed to adopt more sexist viewpoints, as evidenced by their desire to keep women out (of the school, of the curriculum) for fear of disrupting the brotherhood, yet most had shed the machismo they clung to as freshmen and instead embraced their friends in the halls. I mention this difference because my perception of it altered the persona I adopted in front of my respective classes.

**Insulating Innocence from Indoctrination**

Even though I became generally more complicit with the hegemonic gender order in my interactions at St. Albert’s, the discrepancies in my interactions with my freshmen and junior classes imply that there were exceptions to my complicity. I have shown that I let sexist comments slide among my juniors and proceeded with more caution in implementing feminine perspectives into the reading curriculum for that grade level given the pushback I received (even if in jest). In contrast, I policed my freshmen students’ language and homosocial interactions and tried to protect them from potential indoctrination to the culture I described in Chapter 4.

To illustrate this point, I draw from transcripts of class discussions to juxtapose two scenes from my English classroom, both centered on rape. In one of my freshmen classes, Sam read a vocabulary sentence from the book, which stated “During the Vikings’ foray, the surprised villagers…” He finished the sentence by writing (and reading) “were raped.” The class laughed. Instead of letting it go to move on to the next student, I said that I would not associate the word “rape” with “surprised.” While the
student who wrote the sentence tried to excuse it, telling me he “did this assignment late, after rugby practice, and it made sense then,” the class was insistent that, no, rape is surprising. Students started side conversations about the topic, and many were smiling and laughing. Again, I tried to shut it down. In addition to the discussion transcripts, I recorded the event in my teacher journal:

I said that “surprising” would not be a word I’d connect with rape. Terrifying would be more appropriate. Instead of accepting that, some class members kept going with it.

Marc said it would be surprising. I said that if I was not so enraged with their comments right now, I would be speechless, which says a lot because I am rarely speechless. Grady, one of two non-dominant students in the class, said, “It depends on where you live.” I was more dumbfounded. He continued, “If you lived in a gated community, it would be surprising.” Harry, the other non-dominant student, said, “So if you live in the inner city, it is expected?!?” Grady seemed a little embarrassed, but not appropriately so, in my opinion.

Adam pointed out that most people are raped by someone they know. Marc again asserted that rape is surprising. In an attempt to point out the absurdity of his comment, I said, “If, God forbid, a friend told you she was raped, would you ask her if she was surprised?” Marc said he would not, but that he would be surprised. I grew quiet. The class simmered down.

I sensed the futility of my quest to get the class, or at least Marc, to see how the sentence, and their support of it, was inappropriate, but unlike how I typically acted in my junior class, I continued to reiterate the point:

Ms. McEachern: I want you to stop for a minute and think about whether you would say this if your parents were here observing class right now. Think about whether you would say this if the girls you went to middle school with were sitting in this class right now. What you are saying is disturbing, but what is more insulting to me is that you are saying it while smiling and laughing…But stop and think about what you are saying for a moment.

The class was immediately quiet, a silence Mazzei (2007) would label a “polite silence” motivated, perhaps, by a fear of saying something else that would result in a reprimand,
or maybe fear of embarrassing themselves or upsetting me further. I assume they finally realized how upset I was with the conversation. I let the silence linger before I called on another student to read the next vocabulary sentence, at which point Sam said, “I apologize for my comment.” I reflected on this episode in my journal:

I like that I handled it the way I did. I spoke up, let them know their comments were offensive and asked them to think about how their comments would go over in other contexts. The world is not all-male and they need to be prepared for it. Plus, even in an all-male environment, why would this kind of smiling and joking about rape be okay?

Even though I handled it the way I did, I am somewhat disturbed that the students seemed to care more about how I was reacting – that I was upset – than about what they were saying. It is almost as if they believe that what they said offends ME, but probably would not offend someone else. This idea of being the “feminist” faculty member you have to be careful what you say around bothers me, and I realize it is what has made me embrace the silence in some other situations, particularly with older students or those I don’t know as well. I am not sure why this bothers me, though. They are teenaged boys. Isn’t it good to have someone who they know they need to watch what they say around?

As a teacher of freshmen, I considered my role in the classroom was not just to introduce them to literary terms and different genres, but also to orient them to St. Albert’s, including the school’s policies and standards of conduct. Through the way in which I handled this scenario, I attempted to communicate to my freshmen students that making light of a serious topic like rape was not acceptable behavior, and though they were in an all-male school, such an environment did not excuse accountability for their discourse.

However, I handled a similar scenario differently when my juniors were the ones engaging in the rape discourse. I return to an event I discussed in Chapter 5, when my English 3 students were defending Terry’s attempted rape against his wife. In this situation, the students were not directly making light of rape, but by questioning whether
Terry’s actions could really be considered attempted rape when the textual cues all clearly indicated it was, they were minimalizing the severity of Terry’s attack. In this case, I reread the scene aloud to them, as uncomfortable as it was for all of us, and I let the text speak for itself. I did not point out my disappointment that they were excusing Terry’s violence, nor did I implore them to consider how others might construe their reactions and dialogue, as I did with the freshmen.

The more direct parallel from this classroom episode to the freshmen’s, though, was the line from some video that Chris uttered to Billy as he walked out the door for lunch: “Do you see what she’s wearing? All purple! She’s asking to be raped!” As I noted in the previous chapter, I was wearing purple that day, and the students knew it was my favorite color. While the tone of Chris’s comment to Billy was not threatening, and it was clear to me he was quoting a line from somewhere else, the connection to my outfit color left me wondering whether the remark was completely innocent. Rather than ask Chris to stay behind and clarify his statement, or even return to his comment to challenge it when the students came back from lunch, I said nothing. Like the freshmen’s silence, mine was also a silence out of fear. I was not genuinely fearful for my safety given the relationship I felt I had with Chris. Rather, I was fearful that the class would not react the same way my freshmen did and would instead keep pushing back that to joke about rape was okay, or worse, Chris would concede that the comment was in fact directed toward me, even if it was “only” a joke. If I challenged the comment and either of these
situations had actually played out, it would have left me in a difficult spot, which I worked through in my journal:

I realize that I have to delude myself to some extent to continue working here in a happy way. What I mean is that if I allow myself to ponder what goes on here, and I realize it is not equitable and it breeds misogyny, then how can I be complicit in that? Then it means that I have to leave my job, which pays me well and is conveniently located right down the street from where I live. So it is easier not to.

Instead of viewing my role as both an English teacher and an preserver of cultural innocence, as I did with my freshmen, when I encountered my junior class, it was as though I considered their assimilation complete and deemed myself powerless to affect it. In essence, before each class, I subconsciously asked myself, Am I teaching the boys or the men? The “boys” were almost always shorter than me and typically at the start of puberty, truly not yet men. The “men,” though, were often the same height or taller, though sometimes I would lessen the difference by wearing heels. They had deeper voices and, at 16 and 17 years old, were coming close to the end of their physical maturation. If I was teaching the boys, I would do what I could to foster the environment I wanted St. Albert’s to be, but if I was teaching the men, I adopted a “if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em!” attitude.

My efforts to work with the freshmen to cultivate the atmosphere I wanted at St. Albert’s extended beyond the classroom. Aware that I was only one teacher of many my students had, I broke my standard practice of silence when it pertained to issues outside my class that could encourage the indoctrination I feared happened to students over time. One example of my speaking up and challenging another faculty member serves as one
piece of evidence of the various ways I tried to keep my freshmen innocent. On the last
day of school, a freshman came to class saying he watched “the best video” in science,
and he asked if I wanted to see it. I told him we could watch it if there was time at the
end of class, and when he played it, I was caught off guard. The video featured scantily
clad women in bikinis delivering the weather. I told him it was inappropriate and to shut
the video off, and he said, “But we watched it three times in science!” I was so disturbed
that the student’s claim might have been true that I followed up with the teacher, sending
him an email asking for his side of the story. He wrote:

MONTHS ago (one of the reasons I’m shocked it would happen today) I
did a unit on weather. I showed a number of YouTube clips of weather
broadcasts to let them hear the vocab. I didn’t get to preview all of them and it
was one of them...showed it once before realizing it was objectionable...regret it...

Why he would think it would be appropriate to re-play months later in
English class, (I assume you weren’t doing weather-related vocab), I’ll never
know. Sorry to put you in that situation.

The teacher’s recounting of events seemed legitimate, so I gave him the benefit of the
doubt while stressing how destructive such occurrences could be, just in case the benefit
of the doubt was not warranted. I responded:

Thanks for the clarification. I was certain there was a different story behind this.
From the way the student was talking, I got the sense that he had watched the
video today, but I don’t recall if he actually said this. Nevertheless, what the
students think is appropriate behavior, particularly with female teachers, sadly
does not shock me any more because I suspect they get messages in other classes
that the behavior is okay, maybe even condoned. I am glad to hear that is not the
case in your class. Enjoy your summer!

I cannot recall upperclassmen ever telling me about teachers’ inappropriate comments or
lessons in other classes. It is impossible to know whether this did not happen because
they simply never experienced it, or if, by the time they reached junior year, they had the
wherewithal to keep such instances contained to the classroom in which they occurred,
lest they get their teacher in trouble. I would like to think that if the above situation had
happened in my junior class, I would have responded the same way, but I am not sure my
past practice with the juniors supports such an optimistic action on my part.

To address the research questions, *As the classroom teacher, what role did I play
in the construction of gender in my classroom via my pedagogy, and interactions and
relationships with my students?* and *How did the school culture shape the ways my
students and I constructed gender?* in this chapter, I have analyzed my own practice and
how it changed throughout my tenure at St. Albert’s. In some ways, these changes were
positive; disrupting the androcentric reading lists and incorporating alternate texts to
address gender issues made me less complicit in the hegemonic gender order of the
school. However, my increasingly complicit actions, mentioned in Chapter 5 and
elaborated in this chapter, demonstrated that I was probably more complicit overall than I
thought I was, regardless of the job security and student praise I believe I received in
return. The argument in this chapter, combined with the ones I made in the two previous
chapters, suggests an answer to my overarching research question: *How was gender
constructed in the context of an English course at an all-boys Catholic secondary school?*
My students and I read and discussed alternate gender constructions, but through silence,
othering, and teacher and student complicity with the hegemonic gender order, we
ultimately reinforced certain gender norms and contributed to the perpetuation of the brotherhood and the dominant gender structures in place at St. Albert’s.
Chapter Seven
Discoveries and Future Journeys: Arguments and Implications

This dissertation was designed to study how gender was constructed in an all-boys high school English classroom, particularly when I as the teacher selected texts to bring gender issues to the surface. I have argued that, as a branch of the humanities, English provides fertile ground for exploring multicultural issues, including gender. Such exploration is necessary to adolescent development, yet a single-sex learning environment with an English curriculum that only mirrors its student body can limit students’ abilities to see beyond their own experiences and give them the false notion that their perspective is shared by all (Style, 1996). I used texts that reflected different gendered viewpoints to encourage conversation and awareness about how gender is constructed. My analysis of the data sources, including faculty and student interviews, class discussions, student work, school documents and artifacts, and my teacher research journal, suggests that the school’s gender order was in many ways unjust, which affects individual classrooms as well. Students welcomed a curriculum that called attention to gender issues and provided them classroom space to think through issues of identity and relationships, even if such a curriculum seemed to do little to interrupt the gendered personas they adopted and positively affect the unjust gender order.

This study presents my insider’s perspective as a practitioner researcher in a single-sex school, and those of my students and some fellow faculty members. The purpose of this study was not to propose a “genderized” (Slack, 1999) English curriculum
for students in other single-sex settings, but rather to offer one account of one teacher’s exploration of these issues with her classes. The dissertation includes my reflections, reactions, successes, and setbacks to the gendered culture of the school and my classroom and how my students and I challenged and contributed to it. I argue that my perceptions of these issues, along with my students’, combined (and sometimes collided) to create a gendered classroom culture with multiple, complex layers. This chapter focuses on what I learned by examining my own practice as a teacher researcher as well as the implications this knowledge has for both my teaching and the wider academic community. First, I answer the research questions by providing a review of the study’s arguments, and then I end with a discussion of the implications this work has on research, policy, and practice.

**Arguments**

This dissertation addressed the overarching question: *How was gender constructed in the context of an English course at an all-boys Catholic secondary school?* Using the teaching of selected texts in my English class as a strategic research site, I addressed the following subquestions: *As the classroom teacher, what role did I play in the construction of gender in my classroom via my pedagogy, and interactions and relationships with my students? How did students construct gender? How did the school culture shape the ways my students and I constructed gender?* Gender construction is complex and multi-faceted, so Schippers’s (2007) guiding questions for breaking down that construction proved helpful to this study: “1) What characteristics or practices are
understood as manly in the setting? 2) What characteristics or practices are womanly? 3) Of those practices and characteristics, which situate femininity as complementary and inferior to masculinity?” (p. 100). These characteristics and practices are communicated via our interactions with each other and how we present ourselves. When applied to the English classroom, the characteristics and practices can also be those we experience vicariously through the characters in fictional texts and how we interpret and discuss those traits and actions with others in the course.

This study builds three main arguments that actually answer the research questions in reverse order. The first is, though the culture is changing, during my tenure at St. Albert’s, the school community built a brotherhood in part by engaging in silence and othering, both of which took many forms. While this argument does not directly answer a research question, it speaks to the subquestion, How did the school culture shape the ways my students and I constructed gender? And is necessary to understand and give context to the other arguments because these concepts influenced how my students and I constructed gender. The second argument is the homosocial environment acted as a double-edged sword in that it contributed to a comfortable setting for the students to explore gender issues, but it also encouraged the students to shed their unique, multi-faceted masculinities and enact hegemonic gendered behavior that perpetuated an unjust order. This argument addresses the subquestion about the school culture’s influence as well as the subquestion, How did students construct gender? Finally, my analysis of my own practice answered the subquestion, As the classroom teacher, what
role did I play in the construction of gender in my classroom via my pedagogy, and interactions and relationships with my students? and revealed that I, too, was affected by the homosocial space of the classroom. Though I made a conscious effort to support gender justice through my curriculum choices, my interactions and relationships with my students show that I often “traded power for patronage” (Schwalbe et al., 2000, p. 426) as a way to adapt to the school culture, particularly with the upperclassmen, whom I perceived more as adults, with a stronger sense of brotherhood. Together, these arguments answer the overarching question this study sought to explore: How was gender constructed in the context of an English course at an all-boys Catholic secondary school?

**Silence and Othering Helped Build a Brotherhood**

In Chapter 4, I detailed the many types and subjects of silence as well as the different groups whom various community members othered. My interviews with faculty and students, as well as events I recalled in my teacher journal, showed that silence existed around issues of gender and sexual orientation. Community members manifested this silence in different ways. The administration and school community encouraged silence by not actively promoting women’s voices on campus. Women were rarely selected as faculty speakers or award winners, and until recently, women were not promoted to positions of power. In addition, most of the English faculty also encouraged silence by not actively seeking ways to incorporate substantive female authors and protagonists in their curricula. The campus response to an instance of sexist graffiti also revealed that silence occurred in active ways. Most of the male faculty to whom I spoke
invoked veiled silences (Mazzei, 2007a) to avoid speaking about issues of gender and sexual orientation, choosing instead to find ways to frame the graffiti as a compliment to the female faculty it targeted. My intentional silence (Mazzei, 2007a) in response to them further contributed to the perpetuation of silence around these sensitive issues. Administration’s response also represented active silence in that they organized meetings around gendered faculty interactions but did not make connections to other gender issues on campus, such as students’ gendered relationships with faculty, how gender was handled in the curriculum, or how St. Albert’s implied messages about gender in its justification for being a single-sex school. In short, for a school whose requisite admission requirement was being male, St. Albert’s was relatively silent about what that meant and how it shaped school culture, unlike some other single-sex schools in the research that had institutional dialogue about their purpose woven throughout their curriculum, faculty hiring, and professional development (D. L. Anderson, 2005; Craig, 1999-2000; Herr & Naiditch, 2011; Hubbard & Datnow, 2005; Rodrick & Tracy, 2001; Signorella et al., 1996; Singh et al., 1998).

At St. Albert’s, the processes of silencing and othering worked in tandem; when voices were excluded or silenced, particularly voices of marginalized groups, the silence enabled the dominant group to other the marginalized more easily by forming stereotypical, often false, constructions of them. These marginalized groups included women, gay men, students who went to public schools in the area, and those of lower socioeconomic status. The activities of silencing and othering served the goals of
“identity and boundary maintenance” that are necessary to bonding and teambuilding (Wadham, 2013), but in building up school spirit and a sense of belonging to the school brotherhood, St. Albert’s often denigrated others and left some members, namely women in this study, feeling ostracized from the community. This finding gave credence to Addelston’s (1996) results, which supported the equal status contact theory that posits the more equal contact two conflicting groups have, the less likely they are to be antagonistic of each other. In the case of St. Albert’s students, the inverse seemed true: the less equal contact they had with their female peers, and the longer this was the case (i.e., freshmen vs. upperclassmen), the more they seemed to view girls as Others.

It is important to note here that the research questions specifically focused on gender construction and my English classroom, which inevitably limited my data collection and analysis. I do not mean to suggest that issues of gender and sexual orientation were the only ones silenced at the school. In fact, had I expanded my questions to include other often overlooked factors, such as race, age, and class, my findings would certainly be different. However, almost every student in this study mentioned race, and many pointed out the extensive diversity work the school had done (in their opinions), from speakers to focusing on racial relations in various classes. There had also been faculty book groups on the subject of White privilege and what that meant for St. Albert’s educators. I suspect that while there were still silences around race, they might not have been as prevalent as the ones around gender. Likewise, by focusing on the English curriculum in this study, I do not want to imply that other subjects in St.
Albert’s academic program did or did not adhere to a similar androcentric curriculum. In fact, based on what students told me in interviews, the religious studies and social studies departments seemed to be more inclusive of other voices and viewpoints, though, as with many schools, it often depended on which teacher a student had.

**The Homosocial Environment Encouraged Comfort…and Hegemonic Behavior**

This argument, elaborated in Chapter 5, contends that a homosocial environment, such as my English classroom at the all-male St. Albert’s, invites students to feel comfortable discussing gender issues, but it also has the power to encourage hegemonic gendered behavior that contradicts the multi-faceted masculinities students enact in private settings and/or heterosocial settings. My students’ work throughout our gender unit, in addition to taped class discussions, recorded observations in my teacher journal, and interviews with selected students, suggested the class enjoyed the unit because of the safe space it provided to think and talk about sensitive issues such as sexual orientation, what it means to be a man, and how, for better or worse, that concept continues to change. In the absence of female peers, students did not give a second thought to acknowledging and challenging prevailing stereotypes about men, performing skits that explored theories of gender, admitting some of the “feminine” behavior they engaged in, such as waxing their eyebrows, and revealing some of the riskier, “masculine” activities they participated in, such as locker boxing. Every student I interviewed told me if the class were coed, the unit would not have been the same, and the topics we covered would
have been stifled; my experience as a student in a coed high school, and as a teacher in one prior to St. Albert’s led me to believe their assertions.

This safe space to work through gender issues supports what previous researchers have claimed is necessary in gender identity development work with adolescents. Jolliff and Horne (1999) also argued that in order to develop a “mature masculinity,” boys needed to master many tasks, such as learn their place in the family and understand the (many) messages women send about how to be a man. These tasks resonate with Connell’s (2000) ideal goals of educational work with boys: knowledge of gender in one’s own society and others; good, healthy, human relationships; and social justice, which includes gender justice. Keddie and Mills (2007) urged teachers to encourage boys to adopt various forms of masculinity and assist in the type of work Jolliff and Horne (1999) and Connell (2000) advocate for because, as teenagers, high school boys are not equipped to do so on their own. As a researcher with mixed feelings about single-sex education, I concede that this practitioner research study suggests a single-sex class makes boys more comfortable with doing this important work.

In Chapter 5, I noted that another benefit of the unit, beyond having a space to discuss sensitive topics like gender, was boys’ conceptions of masculinity appeared to change. For instance, the character in Herland they most resonated with at the start of the book was the embodiment of the hegemonic male, but by the end, most students had switched to the more “mature masculine” characters, to borrow Jolliff and Horne’s (1999) concept. Such a shift was promising. However, in many ways, this study’s
findings replicated others (Bird, 1996; Martino, 1995) that documented how homosocial spaces (Bird, 1996) and gender work in an English classroom (Martino, 1995) can be counterproductive to interrupting a hegemonic gender order by reinforcing stereotypical gender norms. I was surprised that, despite their often introspective writing assignments on gender and the complex masculinities they presented to me outside of class, my students’ personas in class often resembled a bad television show full of clichéd young men. They frequently engaged in one-upmanship (with each other and me), sexual innuendo, and derogatory language as a way, I suspect, to position themselves and gain (and regain) what I deem their “manhood membership.” Though inexcusable in a classroom setting, this behavior and their subconscious reasoning for it makes more sense in light of Vandello and Bosson’s (2013) concept of “precarious manhood” wherein manhood is understood to be a tenuous status that must be publicly earned and confirmed by others, typically men. While this theory makes my students’ classroom conduct a bit more understandable, their behavior still undermined the gender justice work I was hoping to accomplish with the unit: “When personal conflicts with ideal masculinity are suppressed both in the homosocial group and by individual men, the cultural imposition of hegemonic masculinity goes uncontested” (Bird, 1996, p. 121).

Here, I can only hope that the gender unit will have a long-term effect on my students, and the personas they adopted for each other’s benefit did not actually supersede the goals of the unit, as it appeared to me at the time. Kumashiro’s (2000) warning about trying to judge the success of anti-oppressive pedagogy is important:
The teacher can never really know (1) whether the student learned what he or she was trying to teach, and (2) how the student will be moved by what was learned. The goal that students will first learn and then act ‘critically’ is difficult to achieve when there is much that the teacher cannot and does not know and control. (p. 38)

My interviews with the focal students tuned me into some of the other factors that influenced the perspectives they brought to the room that I would not have otherwise known, and certainly could not control, such as their family’s impact on their conceptions of gender.

The Homosocial Environment Affected Me

The previous chapter chronicled the pedagogical and interactional changes I made over my years at St. Albert’s to challenge and adapt to the culture I perceived. This discovery is the most troublesome to me because it is the one over which I had the most control; yet, I did not provide evidence of the findings I would have liked to see.

This study opened my eyes to my own practice in ways that I could not have anticipated. I considered myself well versed on issues of gender equity, and I aimed to construct lesson plans that prompted students to question societal inequities, not just as they pertained to gender. However, I realize that curricular choices aren’t even half the battle. Assigning certain texts and designing writing prompts to raise certain issues is important, no doubt, but the ways in which we as students and teachers engage in those issues is more prominent. In some ways, I was sending my students mixed messages by bringing in texts with strong female characters and men who enacted different versions of masculinity, but I was undermining those themes with my own discourse. One such
disturbing example was my relative lack of interaction in classroom discussions with students who embodied less stereotypical versions of masculinity, such as focal students Dane and Stokely. Mewborn (1999) notes,

Students take cues about whether they are valued from the teachers’ actions and non-verbal communication. For example, if a teacher tends to socialize with certain students before and after class, other students get the message that they are less valued. (p. 110)

I certainly made an effort to get to know my students well, memorizing all their names by the end of the first week of school, which is harder to do in an all-male school where any name on the roster can apply to anyone in the class. I am also my harshest critic. So, it is possible that my lack of interactions with these students was not as pronounced as it appeared from the class discussion transcripts, which only recorded the dialogue from bell – bell, not the often important moments before and after class when more personal exchanges typically occur. However, the absence of these exchanges during actual class time does tell me that the close relationships I might have had with these students were never put on display for the rest of the class to see, which certainly sent a message, especially since it would appear from the class discussions that I favored and had closer bonds with those students whose behavior I found most deplorable. How might I have changed the classroom dynamic had I encouraged Stokely to share the connections he made in our interviews between race and gender? Would Dane have been more likely to challenge his classmates’ othering of gays had I more explicitly shown him and the class his opinion was one I valued? Whether the lack of such interactions ultimately canceled out any positive effects of my feminist pedagogy is difficult to tell.
Finally, the silence and othering I engaged in and reported throughout this study are quite troubling to me. Though I could argue that both linguistic devices benefitted me in the moment and allowed me to navigate the land of St. Albert’s more easily, I suspect the longer term effects for my students and me when I engaged in these practices were not worth it. I needed to speak up more and stake my claim as a woman who embodies multiple, complex femininities to help my students in their constructions of women.

After all, as Johnson and Weber (2011) detailed in their self study:

> It is through the combination of feminist pedagogies and gender justice practices that a genderful pedagogy gains its meaning and use-value, since…it is not only the plurality of our students’ sexed and gendered lives that must be built into the collective consideration, but the appearances and actuality of our own lives that must be factored into a meaningful pedagogical practice. (p. 154)

I have begun to do this in my new role as Assistant Principal, as I discuss in the final section of this chapter.

**Implications**

A practitioner inquiry study like this one offers perspectives other kinds of studies cannot. An outside researcher would not have had the emic perspective that was crucial to this work, as the intimate knowledge I had of St. Albert’s was necessary for exploring how gender was constructed in this environment. I do not believe my students would have been as honest in their interview responses or as genuine in their classroom interactions had an outside researcher been conducting this work, nor could such a researcher study the change in me over time. However, while a practitioner research methodology was appropriate for this study and adds insiders’ views to the research
conversation on single-sex learning environments, no educational research design can account for all aspects of school life. It is important to note this work occurred in a specific classroom during a fixed period of time with particular students. My experiences at St. Albert’s and the various exchanges I have had with its students over the years tells me the larger arguments I make here are not exceptional to this particular class or year, but the nuances in the data are specific to the context in which this work occurred. St. Albert’s culture has changed since the library graffiti incident, and the students have changed over time as well; had I conducted this study as little as a few years earlier, or in a different classroom, my interactions and observations would no doubt have been different. Therefore, as noted in Chapter 3, this research study is not generalizable to other populations, but it does contribute to the larger research conversation about these classrooms by adding a teacher voice and the perspectives of certain students. While a teacher research study allowed me to utilize my insider knowledge of the school and my classroom, different methodologies better speak to other parts of this larger topic of single-sex education and gender construction and should be pursued to enhance the literature on these subjects. What follows are some ideas of the work ahead. This work has relevance for multiple audiences, as it spans the fields of single-sex education, Catholic education, teacher research, English curriculum, and adolescent gender development. In this section, I provide suggestions for researchers, policy makers, and practitioners, though some of the implications for these different audiences overlap.
As I noted in the first chapter of this dissertation, the body of literature on single-sex education in the U.S. is relatively small, and the work on single-sex Catholic settings is even sparser and mostly outdated. Thus, we need more work in both of these areas. Specifically, in the larger field of single-sex education, as my review of the literature showed, the academic community needs to hear more about boys in these settings. As an English teacher who has heard so much over the last decade about the mounting concern over boys struggling with literacy, I was surprised not to see this reflected more in the literature. We are missing studies that look at how a single-sex education can affect boys’ academic performance in, engagement with, and attitudes about more “feminized” subjects such as the humanities. Research in this area would help dispel, or give a more academic foundation for, the popular U.S. “boy crisis” rhetoric I described in Chapter 1.

In addition, I found it odd that most of the single-sex institutions in the United States are middle or secondary schools, a significant time in adolescent development, yet research linking middle and high school experiences to gender development is lacking. I scratched at the surface of how such a learning environment might affect students during this critical time of growth, but more research on how these settings explicitly help shape students’ gender identities would be enlightening, especially since my review revealed the lack of studies on adolescent gender development, particularly studies that look at the role schooling plays.

In addition, though many studies sought data on graduates of single-sex institutions to extrapolate the effects of these schools, none of the studies I read took a
longitudinal approach to truly investigate how attending a single-sex school changes a student over time. One of the observations I noted in this study that most fascinated me was the stark difference in attitudes and conduct between the freshmen and the upperclassmen, a difference Thompson and Austin (2010) noted as well. Following students throughout their four years at a single-sex secondary school could more systematically document these differences and illuminate the causes of change; for instance, was a student like Dane always quiet in class about his egalitarian gender views, or did more time in an all-male environment contribute to his reticence? On the other hand, was a student like Raymond always confident in revealing his atypical gender experiences, like getting manicures and waxing his eyebrows, or did being in an all-male setting encourage him to be more comfortable talking about such activities? Because I saw these students for the first time as juniors, and only in my English class, I have no way of comparing their performances in my course with their personas as freshmen or the ones they adopted in other classes.

Turning to Catholic education, the largest body of work we have on U.S. Catholic single-sex schools primarily comes from the late 1980s, and there have been only a few studies since then. The field is in need of updated work, perhaps even using recent High School & Beyond Study results, the database that drove much of the research on Catholic settings almost 30 years ago. When looking at the body of research on Catholic schools in general, single-sex distinctions aside, none of the studies investigated the connections between students’ conceptions of gender and the Catholic, Xaverian tradition that serves
as the foundation for the school. However, my focal students all named their religious studies classes as the few courses where they could remember talking about gender issues, which is an option unique to Catholic school settings where religion is almost always a required academic course for all four years.

In both single-sex and Catholic settings, we are in great need of hearing more teachers’ and students’ voices. In the United States, relatively little attention has been paid to how teachers and students interact in these settings, yet in the field of single-sex education, several international pieces focused on teachers (Bailey, 1996; Gray & Wilson, 2006; Parker & Rennie, 1997, 2002; Rennie & Parker, 1997; Schneider & Coutts, 1979; Warrington & Younger, 2003; Younger & Warrington, 2002). Researchers would benefit from trying to replicate these studies in an American context.

The fact that so much of the research on single-sex schools comes from overseas is telling, but not surprising given the explicit policies that exist elsewhere regarding gender and pedagogy. In fact, Australia produces a large volume of research on gender and education issues, in part because they have made gender a national focus through appointed taskforces and various educational policies, such as the National Policy on the Education of Girls in Australian Schools in 1987, the framework for gender equity in schools endorsed by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development, and Youth Affairs in 1997 (Kenway, 1997), and the more recent parliament inquiry report, “Boys: Getting it Right” in 2002 (Gill, 2005). Keddie (2008b) also acknowledged that The Productive Pedagogies framework for quality teaching is a
critical feminist model in wide use in Australia. While this model does not specifically address gender in the way the other policies and programs draw attention to it, the fact that The Productive Pedagogies framework has gained popularity in Australia also helps to explain the copious research on gender that has come from the country; the academic conversations taking place there are clearly different from the ones happening in the U.S. in many ways. Australia’s work shows the strong connection between policy and research. If we would like to influence the research, we need to influence the policy. In the U.S., such policies might be as simple as the Guidelines for a Gender-Balanced Curriculum the NCTE established (Zeller Carson, 1989) in the hopes that educators will be more mindful in their curricular choices.

Earlier in this dissertation, I noted the U.S. Department of Education’s revised regulations under NCLB opened the door for more public schools to take advantage of single-sex offerings in the name of providing more “choice” to parents and students. I would caution policy makers and public school district officials from putting forth such options without careful review of the research and evidence that such an option is warranted in a particular setting. For instance, if data from a certain school shows boys are, indeed, significantly and inexplicably falling behind in literacy, despite typical interventions to remedy the situation, perhaps a single-sex offering would be an option worth considering and monitoring for efficacy. However, public schools wanting to experiment with single-sex classes need to keep in mind that offering such options inevitably affects both sexes. The research I cited in Chapter 2 often only focused on one
sex in such cases, and we must consider how boys and girls fare, even if only one sex prompted such a single-sex class offering.

With such offerings that do exist, schools need to be mindful in their execution of single-sex education and consider how such a distinction influences the school’s mission statement, curriculum, professional development, and teacher and student interactions, and how that single-sex categorization is messaged to constituents. Based on this study, I would recommend that a school first have sound reasons for a single-sex learning environment, as noted above, and that these reasons are regularly reevaluated and revised. Many existing U.S. single-sex schools were formed by religious orders that wanted, in part, to recruit and train youth to join them, as was the case with St. Albert’s history and foundation with the Xaverian Brothers. However, as demographics change, schools can no longer rely solely on their historical roots to justify sex-segregated schools, especially in competitive private school markets. I do not mean to suggest there is no place for these institutions, but rather that they need to answer the question of why single-sex education makes sense in today’s world; parents making educational decisions for their children expect as much. A school community should work together to arrive at the answer to this question, and it should be clearly articulated in a school’s mission or statement of educational philosophy.

Next, a school needs to carefully consider the curriculum choices it makes, from its course offerings to its reading lists to its learning outcomes. As I noted earlier in this work, schools need to provide mirrors to reflect and affirm students’ experiences as well
as windows to encourage and guide students to view the world from other perspectives. While such a task should be incumbent on all schools, the responsibility is even greater in schools whose student body reflects the dominant population, such as the all-male, mainly White, heterosexual, upper middle class population at St. Albert’s. Ensuring that these students are prepared to enter the world beyond its school grounds involves educating them on the diverse, inclusive world in which they live. Specifically, I would urge schools to examine their texts, class examples, and assessments with an eye toward gender, race, and class bias. Teachers and administrators should consistently ask themselves, “Whose perspectives am I privileging? Whose voices am I silencing? What type of person would do well in this environment? What type of person would struggle? What can I do to strike a balance here to create a more equitable environment for all?” These questions apply not just to the students and teachers they gravitate toward and invite to participate, but also to their selection of guest speakers, their choice of examples and texts, and the school and classroom culture they create.

The need to prepare and educate teachers to enter into these environments is an important one, along with regular professional development while they remain in them. The single-sex sites mentioned in the research that did well all met regularly to focus on their purposes for being single-sex and consider how that mission manifested itself in the curriculum, a shift that had not yet occurred at St. Albert’s. In terms of professional development, Mewborn (1999) pointed out “few strategies for creating a gender equitable classroom or school have been articulated in publications aimed at classroom teachers
and school leaders” (p. 103). Practitioners need these, but they need not wait for them to be delivered to their classroom; an inquiry stance encourages teachers and administrators to study the sites that might benefit and then develop their own strategies. Schools with single-sex offerings ought to develop an in-house professional development model that specifically looks at situations unique to a sex-segregated environment, such as parents who challenge female teachers over grades more readily than their male counterparts, students who make sexist remarks in class, or teachers who encourage stereotypical constructions of gender in the name of science (i.e., “Boys will be boys; girls will be girls.”). I suspect my transition would have been much smoother had I been offered practice in handling the situations that came up in this study in an appropriate way that contributed to a just gender order, and if the faculty presented a unified front by responding similarly.

Without careful hiring, teacher preparation, and professional development, administrators could be placing teachers in single-sex classrooms who reify difference between the sexes, even if inadvertently, as I fear I did at times. At one conference presentation I attended, a colleague presented his research for observing single-sex middle schools (Glasser, 2008). When teaching the mass of an object to the single-sex boys’ class, the teacher used a football to demonstrate the concept, but she switched to a makeup compact for the girls’ class. Without oversight and intervention, students could leave that classroom with a certain message about what boys and girls do or think.
A final implication for practitioners that stemmed from this research is the value of giving boys space to explore gender issues, particularly topics surrounding what it means to be a man. Such work might be easier to incorporate in an all-boys school, but it should occur in coed settings as well. When planning the unit I implemented for this study, I did not intend to spend so much time discussing concepts of masculinity and the stereotypes that drive them, but one discovery that surprised me in this work was how well my students responded to the articles, writing prompts, and the documentary that I included on this topic, and how eager they were for more of it. Although male characters and authors dominated St. Albert’s English reading curriculum, it seemed clear to me that my students had not disected the representations of masculinity they had been reading.

These conversations about gender issues are important for both sexes, as sexism has harmful implications for both females and males, as I touched on earlier when explaining the definition of feminism I find most helpful. While men, particularly White heterosexual men, embody the hegemonic ideal prevalent in the modern U.S., it is naïve to ignore the ways such an masculine ideal harms men just as it privileges them. Noted psychologist Michael Thompson, who has written about and worked with boys for decades (see, e.g. Kindlon & Thompson, 2000), recently ran a workshop with St. Albert’s faculty wherein he delineated the ways sexism harms boys’ psyches. Society teaches U.S. boys at an early age that they should be stoic rather than emotional and aggressive rather than empathetic. No doubt such ideals drove Chris’s father and brother to tease him about being in the kitchen and encourage boys like my students to engage in the
risky behavior of locker boxing. These stereotypes lead to a one-dimensional representation of acceptable masculinity that, if one tries to embody, can damage his relationships with not only the women in his life but other men as well. In my literature review, I noted studies that found male graduates of single-sex schools were less satisfied with the social aspects of their colleges (Lee & Marks, 1990) and that they displayed more traditional versions of masculinity (Addelston, 1996). Any practitioner ought to be concerned with how stereotypical gender conceptions affect his or her developing students, but those in all-boys settings should be particularly mindful of fostering discussions on this topic and implementing curriculum to address help inform those discussions.

**Postscript**

As an English teacher accustomed to writing in the literary present tense to suggest that what happens in a text will always happen in that text each time one reads it, my use of past tense in describing the school, its faculty, and students is purposeful here. Not only as I describing a study that happened in the past, but in many ways, the St. Albert’s I describe here is not the St. Albert’s I work at today. This practitioner research study officially took place during the 2012-2013 school year, but as I noted in Chapter 4, the impetus for this work began much earlier, when I first stepped foot in a St. Albert’s classroom in 2003 and felt woefully unprepared to be a non-dominant member of the community, as I could not remember feeling like that ever before. I had also not worked in a male-dominated workplace before, nor had I had a male boss since one summer job I
took in college. I was out of my element and trying to find my place at the school, receiving little guidance from others on how to do so. My vision of the role I play – and should play – has taken many turns over my 11-year tenure there.

As frustrating as it may be, the most lasting change in schools is change that happens slowly and deliberately, and this is the type of change I have seen at St. Albert’s in recent years. When the headmaster who hired me left, and the principal I came in with took the headmaster’s role and hired a feminist principal to replace him, change was in the works. Returning to Connell’s (2000) structures of gender model, St. Albert’s labor and power relations structures have seen the most change so far. Early in my St. Albert’s career, there was one female administrator; now six out of fourteen are women, including me. The changes in these structures have not resulted in significant change to the other two structures, emotional and communication relations, but instituting change in these areas is one of the reasons I decided to apply for the position when it unexpectedly opened in the summer of 2013.

I will be in good company. The admissions and communications directors, who actively work on the messaging and marketing of our school, are also women, as is the Assistant Principal for Student Life, who oversees student extra- and co-curricular programs. In addition, the school hired a woman to fill the vacant Director of Multicultural Affairs and Community Development position that opened up the summer after this study as well. Just halfway into the school year, she spearheaded a movement to form a faculty book group to read *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*
(Sandberg, 2013), and the feminist principal authorized covering the cost of the books for all who wanted to participate. The last time the school promoted a similar book group, the topic was White privilege and racial relations. While a book group reading about ways to encourage women to lead does not itself make for gender equity, nor does it overthrow the hegemony that exists at the school, it is hopefully the start of a shift in how the school has traditionally viewed multiculturalism (as a race issue) and the beginning of a long conversation that discusses gendered relations in all its various forms at St. Albert’s. I am hopeful about the work ahead and committed to creating a gender equitable school for the Raymonds, Chrises, Danes, Stokelys, Carters, and Tophers yet to enter St. Albert’s doors.
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Appendices

Appendix A: St. Albert’s English Department Required Core Texts

FRESHMEN TITLES

All teachers are required to teach the following:

- *A Book of Short Stories 2*
- A major work of nonfiction – memoir?
- A poetry unit
- *Julius Caesar* or *Romeo & Juliet* – could do *Midsummer*
- *To Kill a Mockingbird, A Separate Peace,* or *Animal Farm*
- 5-paragraph essay at the beginning of the year

In addition, teachers may choose to teach any of the titles from the auxiliary list:

- *Great Expectations*
- *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*
- *Inherit the Wind*
- *12 Angry Men*
- *A Raisin in the Sun*
- *Odyssey*

*Teachers are required to teach the summer reading and *A Book of Short Stories 2* in the first semester.

SOPHOMORE TITLES

All teachers are required to teach the following:

- *Archetypes in Literature*
- *Oedipus*
- *Macbeth*
- *Death of a Salesman*
- *Lord of the Flies*

In addition, teachers may choose to teach *The Natural.*
JUNIOR TITLES

All teachers are required to teach the following:

- *The Great Gatsby*
- *A Streetcar Named Desire*
- *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*
- Anne Bradstreet? – excerpts from Charlotte Gordon
- A contemporary novel (suggestions below)
- A modern drama - *Crucible*
- 19th century poetry (Whitman, Dickinson)
- 20th century poetry (Harlem Renaissance, Frost, etc.)
- A work(s) from Hawthorne
- A work(s) from Thoreau
- A work(s) from Hemingway
- Selected excerpts from 18th and 19th century short stories and essays
- Modern stories from the anthology?
- Suzan-Lori Parks?
- *Where are you going?, A Good Man is Hard to Find,*
- Research paper and presentation part of final

In addition, teachers may choose to teach *Ceremony, The Catcher in the Rye,* and/or *Their Eyes Were Watching God.*

SENIOR TITLES

All teachers are required to teach at least 2 major medieval works:

- *Beowulf*
- *The Canterbury Tales*
- *The Inferno*
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

A selection from Shakespearean Drama

- Hamlet
- Othello
- Richard III
- other . . .
A selection of lyric poetry (Renaissance - Modern)

A major novel, i.e.:

- *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*
- *Frankenstein*
- *Wuthering Heights*
- *Hard Times*
Appendix B: Faculty Interview Protocol

*Background*

1. How many years have you been teaching? How many years have you been teaching at St. Albert’s?

2. Why did you choose to teach at St. Albert’s?

3. Please describe how you see your role at St. Albert’s.

**Probe:** Do you believe your role differs from those in the same position but of the other sex? Why or why not?

4. What experiences and understandings do you bring to your teaching?

*Relationships with Colleagues*

5. How supported do you feel by your colleagues, personally and professionally?

**Probe:** Generally speaking, do you notice a difference in the support you get from male and female colleagues?

**Probe:** Have you ever felt bullied?

6. Have you ever witnessed instances of sexism among colleagues? If so, how did you handle it?

*Relationships with Students*

7. Generally, do you think the students view their male teachers differently than their female teachers? How so?

8. In what ways do you prepare your students for the coed world beyond St. Albert’s?

**Probe:** Do you take into account the sex of your students when planning your curriculum?

9. Have you ever witnessed instances of sexism in your classes? If so, how did you handle it?

*School Culture*

10. Please describe how you view the all-boys environment.

**Probe:** In what ways do you feel it’s positive? In what ways is it negative?

11. Have you faced discrimination in any way since you’ve been teaching at St. Albert’s?
12. “Women in a male-dominated organization may become expert observers of the male culture as they navigate their day-to-day interactions with colleagues...because their survival is dependent on knowing the culture of [men]. The dominant group is under no equivalent obligation” (Herr & Anderson, 2005 p. 44). Would you agree or disagree with this statement? Can you explain?

Closing Remarks: Is there anything else you’d like to share that I did not cover?
Appendix C: Email Text Sent to Parents/Guardians

Dear Parents and Guardians,

As you may know, I am finishing my doctoral work at Boston College and am working on my dissertation. For this work, I am marrying my interests in gender, single-sex education, and secondary English as I embark on a study of my own classroom practice. Specifically, I am asking how gender is constructed in our single-sex English classroom, using selected texts within our curriculum to fuel the conversation on this topic. Because your son is in my class this year, I am inviting him to participate in the research. I have discussed this research with the principal, Dr. Keith Crowley, and he has given me his blessing to conduct this research.

Tomorrow in class, I will explain my dissertation research to the students, so I wanted to first tell you. Attached to this email is a parental permission slip that outlines the study along with the potential benefits and risks. I will highlight some of that information in this email, but I encourage you to read it thoroughly and contact me with any questions. The permission slips must be mailed back to me, but you can reply to this email with questions, or we can discuss the study during parent-teacher conferences this month. Alternatively, we can arrange a phone or in-person meeting.

What will the study involve?

If you give your son permission to participate, and he agrees, I will collect his assignments and document his contributions to class discussions during an upcoming 6-week unit. Additionally, I will ask to interview select students three times – before, during, and after the unit – to understand how they are thinking about the work we’re doing. These interviews will be up to a class period in length and will ideally occur during school, but they may need to be scheduled before or after school depending on our mutual free periods. Unless he is selected to interview, your son will not have to complete any additional work to participate in this study.

What are the benefits?

Compared to other areas of educational research, the literature on single-sex education is slim, and very little of it involves teacher and student perspectives. Participating in this project will contribute to that gap in the research and will benefit other teachers and researchers interested in this work. Additionally your son may be more motivated during the unit!

It is important that you know your son will not be paid for his participation, nor will he receive extra credit or a leg up on the competition should he choose to apply to Boston College in the future.

What are the risks?

Because the data I am collecting is part of normal pedagogical practice, there are no known risks to your son’s participation. If he is selected to interview, he will have the option to disregard any question he wishes.

What will happen if he doesn’t participate?
Nothing. I will simply not include his work or his class discussion contributions in my analysis and any future presentations or publications of the work. He will be assured that not participating will have no bearing on his relationship with me, or his grades in the class. I will also encourage your son to talk to Dr. Tanum or Mr. Dwyer, the English department chair, if he has concerns about the project, so that he feels he has someone separate from me to speak frankly with without fear of retribution.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this project. I look forward to the many ways this research can enhance my teaching and a larger understanding of single-sex education.

Most sincerely,
Kirstin McEachern
Appendix D: Student Interview Protocols

First Interview (Prior to Unit)
Introduction/Overview
As I have told you, this study investigates how gender is discussed, written about, and understood within our current English class. We haven’t started our gender unit yet, and before we do, I want to understand how you think about gender, especially as a St. Albert’s student, and in our classroom with me as a female teacher. The interview won’t take longer than a class period (60 minutes), and you are encouraged to ask questions at any time. Also, please know that you can refuse to answer any question at any time.

• Before we begin, do you have any questions regarding the study?
• Are you ready to begin?

Background
• Can you tell me more about your family, and what a typical weeknight is like?
• Did you want to come to St. Albert’s, or was it your parents’ decision? Did you care that it was all-boys?
• So, the school you attended before St. Albert’s was coed, right? As far as I can tell, some of the boys at the St. Albert’s still see their friends from their old schools and others don’t. How about you?
• Do you have a job or some other activities outside of school that give you opportunities to interact with girls?

School Culture
• How would you describe our school to a friend or relative who doesn’t know St. Albert’s?
  o Would you say it’s similar to or different from other schools you’ve gone to?
• What do you like about the school being all-boys? What don’t you like about that part?
• How do you think we’d be different if we allowed girls?

Classroom Culture
• How is our English class similar to or different from other classes you have taken here?

Relationships with Teachers
• Do you notice a difference in a class with a male teacher versus a female teacher? Can you explain?
• Do you think students have different relationships with female teachers than they do with male teachers? Why or why not?

Theories of Gender
• What does the word “gender” mean to you?
• Do you think boys and girls are “wired” differently, or do you think we as a society make it seem that way? Why?
• Do you think someone’s gender affects his or her perspective? Why or why not?

Closing Remarks
• Is there anything else you’d like to share that I did not ask?

Thank you for your participation. Remember that if you have any questions about this interview, or about the study in general, you can ask me at any time.

Second Interview (During the Unit)
Introduction/Overview
As you may remember, this study investigates how gender is discussed, written about, and understood within our current English class. We are now about halfway into our gender unit, so I am curious to know how what we’ve been talking and reading about in class has affected the way you think about gender. The interview won’t take longer than a class period (60 minutes), and you are encouraged to ask questions at any time. Also, please know that you can refuse to answer any question at any time.

• Before we begin, do you have any questions regarding the study?
• Are you ready to begin?

Classroom Culture
• How do you think our class discussions would go if girls were in the room?
• How do you think this unit would be different if a male teacher taught it?
• I’ve noticed some students are “freer” with their language than others. Do you think they would talk like this if I weren’t the teacher? Do you think they would say these things with girls in the classroom?

Gender Unit
• Out of the writing assignments that we’ve done so far, which one has helped you the most in thinking about the concept of gender? What have you learned from it?
• Which reading assignments that we’ve done so far, which one has helped you the most in thinking about the concept of gender? What have you learned from it?
• I noticed students are having a hard time picturing the Herland women. Have you noticed that as well? If so, why do you think that is? If not, how do you interpret this?

Specific Topics in Unit
• Locker boxing. Have you ever done this? Is this a typical St. Albert’s ritual? Do you see it as a form of bullying?
• During the writing prompt about what an outsider would notice about St. Albert’s, many people noted the wealth of the campus as evidenced by the grounds, how we dress, and the cars in the parking lot. A few noticed that it was all boys, but no one said what this might mean. What might an outsider think this means?

School Culture
• Have you discussed, or do you discuss gender in other classes?
  o If so: What are those conversations like? Where do they happen?
  o If not: Do you think that it should be discussed at an all-boys school? Is it odd to you that we don’t have those conversations?

Theories of Gender
• In our last interview, I asked what the word “gender” meant to you. What does the word “gender” mean to you now?
• We have learned about different theories of gender. Which one do you think best fits how you think about gender? Why?
• Do you think someone’s gender affects his or her perspective? Why or why not?

Closing Remarks
• Is there anything else you’d like to share that I did not ask?

Thank you for your participation. Remember that if you have any questions about this interview, or about the study in general, you can ask me at any time.

Final Interview (After the Unit)
Introduction/Overview
As you know, this study investigates how gender is discussed, written about, and understood within our current English class. Since we have finished our gender unit, I am interested to learn what you thought about it and how it has affected the way you think about gender and St. Albert’s. The interview won’t take longer than a class period (60 minutes), and you are encouraged to ask questions at any time. Also, please know that you can refuse to answer any question at any time.
  • Before we begin, do you have any questions regarding the study?
  • Are you ready to begin?

Gender Unit
• Out of the assignments, which one helped you the most in thinking about the concept of gender? What have you learned from it?
• Did you enjoy this unit? Why or why not?
• What suggestions can you offer if I were to teach this unit again?

Student Specific (Sample)
• Early on in the unit, Raymond admitted to getting his eyebrows waxed and getting manicures in the past. Before he said this, you had said this was stuff guys didn’t do, and then you kind of relaxed a bit after he said that. Why? Did he convince you it was okay, or did you not want to alienate him?
• I know you had difficulty with the creative writing assignment. Why is that?
• In your quick write on how the male characters would fit in at St. Albert’s, you said that Terry wouldn’t do well because he’s stubborn and his inability to change his mind on controversial topics wouldn’t be liked here. Can you explain that?

• In your first quick write, you said the character you were most like was Terry (you later changed to Jeff), and you focused on him in some of your writings – like the creative piece and in the quick write conversation with CPG, you asked how the story would change without Terry. What do you make of his character, and why did you identify so strongly with him?

Classroom Observations
• Back to Raymond’s admission – do you think he would have said such a thing if we were in a coed class? Let’s say he had said it, how do you think the reaction would be different from the class? Would it be more severe (from the guys) if girls were in the room?

• Earlier in the unit, when we read the packet on boys, you said you already know what boys think and it would be better to learn about girls. Do you think we need to do more with bringing girls’ voices into the classroom? Did Herland help you at all?

• The class has talked quite a few times about the concept of “brotherhood,” one time being when I mentioned students’ reactions to the death of their classmate. What does this mean to you? Why do you think it’s unique to our school?

Classroom Culture
• How do you think my interactions with you or the class as a whole influenced our gender unit?
• Would you classify me as “a typical girl”?
• Do you think our classroom is a place where students are encouraged to be a certain type of boy, or do you think students are encouraged to be whoever they truly are?
  o Have I given you any indication of what the ideal man should be, or the ideal student here?

School Culture
• Did this unit on gender change how you feel about single-sex education?
• Do you think St. Albert’s is a school where students are encouraged to be a certain type of boy, or do you think students are encouraged to be whoever they truly are?
• Have your impressions of St. Albert’s changed since we started this unit?
• Has our work in this unit affected how you view or act in other classes?
• Part of why I wanted to study this topic is because I don’t think we talk about gender nor do we supplement our single-sex learning environment with different gendered viewpoints. For instance, in the English department, we read a lot of books by male authors and stereotypical male characters. Do you think this is true? Do you think this is a good thing?
• What else could the school do to prepare you for the co-ed world?
Theories of Gender

- In our previous interviews, I asked what the word “gender” meant to you. What does the word “gender” mean to you now after completing this unit?
- Do you still believe in (the theory of gender mentioned in previous interview)? How did the unit assignments help enforce or change your belief in this theory?
- Do you think someone’s gender affects his or her perspective? Why or why not?

Closing Remarks

- Is there anything else you’d like to share that I did not ask?

Thank you for your participation. Remember that if you have any questions about this interview, or about the study in general, you can ask me at any time.
Appendix E: Code Dictionary

Codes, Definitions, and Examples from Data Sources
*Note that I assigned multiple codes to many data sources; for simplicity’s sake, I do not list the cross-coding for the examples listed here

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CODE / CLASSIFICATION OF SUBCODE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION / EXAMPLE OF SUBCODE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SILENCE (SH)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- WHO</td>
<td>Any mention or suggestion of community members being or remaining silent; examples of silence when a topic or voice might reasonably be heard/voiced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- WOMEN (WOM)</td>
<td>Lack of female speakers at assemblies and school functions relative to the percentage of the women on the faculty and staff. – School Artifacts &amp; Records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>- YOUNG FEMALE TEACHER (YFT)</td>
<td>“I’ve seen the younger female teachers in sticky situations and I want to speak up on their behalf, and I don’t because I don’t want to reinforce a stereotype of rescuing the ‘damsel in distress’.” – Dennis, Faculty Interview</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>- VETERAN FACULTY (VF)</td>
<td>“You know where I’ve felt – not bullied, but like they don’t want to listen to me? When you mention anything in the past, it’s like they don’t want to hear it. There’s a definite stigma against veteran faculty, so I don’t bring it up any more.” – Peggy, Faculty Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- MALE FACULTY (MFAC)</td>
<td>“Meanwhile, the other men at the table didn’t say anything, but not out of discomfort or intimidation (at least it didn’t seem that way to me).” – Field Notes, Teacher Journal</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- UPPERCLASSMEN (UPC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Students in my junior class told me the graffiti had been there for the whole year, but no one reported it.” – Field notes, Teacher Journal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- <strong>UNDERCLASSMEN (UNC)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Silence. I then call on my more serious student, Charlie, to read the next sentence. We move on.” – Field Notes, Teacher Journal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- <strong>LGBTQ COMMUNITY MEMBERS (LGBTQ)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“ABS members said they were ‘hiding in plain sight’ and that they were ‘not a minority you can put a finger on.’ When we talk about diversity on campus, this is not a group we tout, according to them.” – Field notes from ABS meeting, Teacher Journal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- <strong>ADMINISTRATION (ADM)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I finally had to say to them, ‘Can we stop talking about this?’ I was the only woman in the room. It was not cool to talk to them about how the boys talk to each other about my body.” – Sara, Faculty Interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- <strong>WHAT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| *Topics that might naturally be discussed but were never voiced, or topics where silence arises due to censure or self-censure for previously speaking*
| - **IMPLICATIONS OF SINGLE-SEX EDUCATION (ISSE)** |
| “Someone has to acknowledge that the indirect implication to students when you send them to school and girls can’t be there is that there’s something different and there’s a reason to exclude women sometimes and that’s going to lead to all kinds of other assumptions.” – Sara, Faculty Interview |
| - **SEXUAL ORIENTATION (SO)** |
| “The type of discrimination that I feel is
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phenomenon</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race (RACE)</td>
<td>The relative absence of writers and protagonists from non-dominant populations on the St. Albert’s reading lists. – St. Albert’s School Documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic Class (SC)</td>
<td>Students “othering” those who do not attend St. Albert’s, without a thought to how the school might have been financially out of reach. – Student Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (GEN)</td>
<td>The relative absence of women and LGBTQI writers and protagonists on the St. Albert’s reading lists. – St. Albert’s School Documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why</td>
<td><strong>Potential reasons for a community member's silence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear (FEAR)</td>
<td>My silence in response to potentially threatening student comments. – Teacher Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Futility (FUT)</td>
<td>“I said, ‘If, God forbid, a friend told you she was raped, would you ask her if she was surprised?’ Marc said he would not, but that he would be surprised. I grew quiet.” – Teacher Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson Teacher (LT)</td>
<td>“I like that I handled it the way I did. I spoke up, let them know their comments were offensive and asked them to think about how their comments would go over in other contexts. The world is not all-male and they need to be prepared for it. Plus, even in an all-male environment, why...” – Teacher Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-TYPE</td>
<td>Mazzei’s (2003) categories of silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>- POLITE SILENCE (POS)</td>
<td>Class quieting when I asked for them to think about the importance of their words when rape discourse came up. – Teacher Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- PRIVILEGED SILENCE (PRIS)</td>
<td>Enacted by students in lack of awareness of those who cannot attend St. Albert’s. – Student Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- VEILED SILENCE (VS)</td>
<td>Male faculty to me: “You still got it!” – Teacher Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- INTENTIONAL SILENCE (IS)</td>
<td>My grimace and silence in response to men framing the graffiti as a compliment. – Teacher Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- PRESUMPTIVE SILENCE (PRES)</td>
<td>“Well, at least our boys have good taste in women. Think about it – everyone mentioned is smart, assertive, and no-nonsense. If these are the women they fantasize about…” – Faculty member, as recalled in Teacher Journal</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OTHERING (Ot)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-WHO</td>
<td>Any mention or suggestion of groups being objectified or distanced from the dominant group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-WOMEN (WOM)</td>
<td>“I don’t think women can do what I can do.” – Joe, Faculty Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-PUBLIC SCHOOL KIDS (PUB)</td>
<td>“Oh, come on – this is an easy question – this is for the kids in public school!” – Field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Notes, Teacher Journal</td>
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<td>-------------------------</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>-LGBTQ (LGBTQ)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>“What was your dad like – ‘All right, Nancy boy, you like cookin’? We’ll send you to cookin’ school!’” – Carter, Class Discussion Transcript</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>-LOWER CLASSES (LOW)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I really feel that with the administration and the board of trustees, you have to have a certain college name that looks good in the literature that they send out to prospective students.” – Matt, Faculty Interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>-TYPE</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>Schwalbe et al.</em>’s (2000) types of othering</td>
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</table>

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<tr>
<th>-OPPRESSIVE OTHERING (OO)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research shows that boys and girls learn differently. St. Albert’s is geared towards the distinct learning needs of boys and our teachers teach to the strengths of boys. – St. Albert’s Website</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>-DEFENSIVE OTHERING (DO)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“There’s a couple of women who seem to want to make trouble…and I don’t really know why.” – Peggy, Faculty Interview</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>-IMPLIED OTHERING (IO)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Sometimes guys will talk about women in ways that I don’t think are right [and] I’d say, you know, ‘You shouldn’t say that,’ or ‘That’s not appropriate.’” – Joe, Faculty Interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BROTHERHOOD (Bro)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- HISTORICAL (HIST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Inspired by the conviction that faith finds its full expression in service to others, Ryken set out to establish a “brotherhood, a society of men, bound by vows of religion and living in community” to work among the poor. This commitment to those who...”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
live on the margins of society endures as a fundamental Xaverian value, and it informs everything that we do at St. Albert’s.” – St. Albert’s website

- EXCLUSIONARY (EXCL)
  “The [ refrain of] “We are St. Albert’s,” while it’s meant to build this community—the goal, the charisms—what they stress is the idea of building this band of brothers because they’re an all-male organization. But what they’re talking about is building community, and when they continue to use that charism, they’re excluding women.” Patty, Faculty Interview

- FAVORABLE (FAV)
  “Oh definitely, there’s kids that if I went to public school that I wouldn’t even think to talk to but since it’s St. Albert’s, not even because it’s social status, because like I feel like there’s no cliques or groups at St. Albert’s. You can just talk to anybody.” – Carter, Student Interview 3

- REJECTING (REJ)
  “I think the brotherhood thing’s kind of stupid, to be honest. I’d go out of my way to help anyone, not to make me sound like an amazing person but it’s the right thing to do.” – Dane, Student Interview 3

### MULTIPLE MASCULINITIES (MM)

- HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY (HM)
  Chris’s story of locker boxing size-ups. – Class Discussion Transcripts

- COMPLICIT MASCULINITY (CM)
  Brad’s laughter at the sexual innuendos in class. – Class Discussion Transcripts; Field Notes from Teacher Journal

- SUBORDINATE MASCULINITY (SM)
  Chris’s story of being teased for cooking. –
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Discussion Transcripts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MARGINALIZED MASCULINITY (MM)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stokely self-identifying as Puerto Rican. – Stokely, Student Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MULTIPLE FEMININITIES (MF)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HEGEMONIC FEMININITY (HF)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My silence surrounding students’ sexual innuendos. – Teacher Journal; Class Discussion Transcripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMPLICIT FEMININITY (CF)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternity leave benefits. – Faculty Handbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUBORDINATE FEMININITY (SF)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I give detentions all the time for their disrespectful comments.” – Maeve, Faculty Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DISCRIMINATION (DISC)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TYPE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SEXISM (SEX)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I was once told that the snowflakes on my sweater were very nicely placed.” – Patty, Faculty Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RACISM (RACE)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“You’d jump the fence; you’re Mexican.” – Stokely, Student Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FACULTY STATUS (FAC)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“You know where I’ve felt – not bullied, but like they don’t want to listen to me? When you mention anything in the past, it’s like they don’t want to hear it. There’s a definite stigma against veteran faculty, so I don’t bring it up any more.” – Peggy, Faculty Interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F: School Clubs

- Academic Bowl
- Always Our Brothers and Sisters
- Amnesty International
- Animal Rights Club
- Anime
- Art and Design
- Asian Cultural Club
- Aviation
- Best Buddies
- Breakdancing
- Celtic Band
- Chamber Ensemble
- Chess Club
- Computer
- Concordia
- Cross Fit
- Cultural Immersion
- Drama Guild
- Economics Club
- Engineering Club
- Environmental
- Film Club
- Fishing
- Free Write
- French
- French Conversation
- Future Entrepreneurs
- Future Problem Solvers
- German
- Greek and Latin
- History
- Improv
- Investment
- Jewish Student Union
- LUNA
- Martial Arts
- Math Team
- Mental Blocks
- Mock Trial
- Movie Club
- Music Project
- National Honor Society
- NYC Model UN
- Phantom Gourmet
- Philosophy
- Photography
- St. Albert’s Pride
- Robotics
- Rubik’s Cube
- Science Fiction and Fantasy
- Science League Team
- Senior/Junior Prom
- ST. ALBERT’S Sports Science
- ST. ALBERT’S Sports Network
- Social Studies Activities
- Spanish
- Spanish Conversation
- Spire Brass
- Sports Action Video Editing
- Sports and Society: Film and Discussion
- Student Council
- Surfing
- Swingtown
- Taiwan Exchange
- Travel Choir
- Ultimate Eagle
- Woodwinds Ensemble
- Yearbook
- Young Democrats
- Young Libertarians
- Young Republicans
## Appendix G: English Department Book List 2012-2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th># of Teachers</th>
<th>Class &amp; Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Orwell</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Great Stories</td>
<td>Tasman</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Tale of Two Cities</td>
<td>Dickens</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian</td>
<td>Alexie</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1A, 1CP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</td>
<td>Twain</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3CP, 3A, 3H, 3AP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Bliss</td>
<td>Harrington</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Short Story Masterpieces</td>
<td>Carver</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3CP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Farm</td>
<td>Orwell</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1CP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bean Trees</td>
<td>Kingsolver</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Flynn</td>
<td>Flynn</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4CP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beowulf</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4A, 4AP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Boy</td>
<td>Wright</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brave New World</td>
<td>Huxley</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4A, 4AP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Canterbury Tales</td>
<td>Chaucer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Canticle for Leibowitz</td>
<td>Miller</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Catcher in the Rye</td>
<td>Salinger</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3CP, 3A, 3H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Christmas Carol</td>
<td>Dickens</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4CP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Crucible</td>
<td>Miller</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3CP, 3A, 3AP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dandelion Wine</td>
<td>Bradbury</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dante's Inferno</td>
<td>Hollander</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4AP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death of a Salesman</td>
<td>Miller</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2CP, 2A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disgrace</td>
<td>Coetzee</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4AP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Faustus</td>
<td>Marlowe</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4AP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dubliners</td>
<td>Joyce</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerson</td>
<td>Emerson</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endurance</td>
<td>Shackleton</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1CP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethan Frome</td>
<td>Wharton</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3A, 3H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Loud &amp; Incredibly Close</td>
<td>Safran Foer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4CP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Farewell to Arms</td>
<td>Hemingway</td>
<td>2</td>
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# Appendix H: Class Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class #, Date, Day, Rotation Day</th>
<th>Class Content, (Homework)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class 1 – January 7 (Monday), Day 7</td>
<td>Theories of Gender, Lady Gaga’s “Born This Way,” Begin “Gendered Reading” handout (Vocab)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class 2 – January 8 (Tuesday), Day 1</td>
<td>Continue “Gendered Reading” handout (Study for vocab quiz)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class 3 – January 10 (Thursday), Day 3</td>
<td>Quick write prompt: “What does it mean to be a man?” Discuss lyrics of “I’m Still a Guy” by Brad Paisley, “Understanding Boys” handout (Study for vocab quiz, journal entries)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class 4 – January 11 (Friday), Day 4</td>
<td>Vocab quiz, “Understanding Boys” handout with partner work, Presentations on partner findings (Read “The Unnatural Mother” &amp; complete take home quiz)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class 5 – January 16 (Wednesday), Day 6</td>
<td>*Snowy morning that should have been delay. Students could revise/spend more time on their take home quiz, complete next vocab list, then watched first twenty minutes of Mansome. (Buy Herland)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class 6 – January 17 (Thursday), Day 7</td>
<td>Continuation of presentations, unit 9 vocab due before lunch, Quick write writing prompt after lunch: “Choose 1 of the 8 assumptions that you strongly disagree with and explain why in a brief paragraph. Then, choose 1 you strongly agree with and do the same.” Start discussion and notes of “The Unnatural Mother.” (Read first chapter of Herland)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class 7 – January 18 (Friday), Day 1</td>
<td>Finish discussion and notes for “The Unnatural Mother.” Introduction of Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Quick write prompt: Which of the three male explorers do you most identify with and why? Cite the text for support.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class 8 – January 23 (Wednesday), Day 3</td>
<td>(Read chapter 2 of <em>Herland</em>) Vocab Quiz 9b, Quick write prompt: Adopt an outsider view of St. Albert’s. What would you notice? What impressions would you have about this place? Discussion of the characterization and purpose of the three male explorers. Chart on what actions or assumptions the characters make and what conclusions those bring us to. (Read chapter 3 of <em>Herland</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 9 – January 24 (Thursday), Day 4</td>
<td>Quick write prompt: “Throughout chapter 3, Van mentions how the women are educating the men on their language and society. On page 35, he names the three tutors assigned to each of the men: Somel, Zava, and Moadine. From the perspective of one of these tutors, write a journal entry after one of the tutoring sessions. What do you imagine the woman thinks of her subject? Make sure your response is grounded in the text, and provide page numbers for support.” (Read chapters 4 and 5 of <em>Herland</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class 10 – January 28 (Monday), Day 6</td>
<td>Reading Quiz on <em>Herland</em>. Creative paper assignment. (Read chapter 6 of <em>Herland</em>)</td>
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<td>Class 11 – January 29 (Tuesday), Day 7</td>
<td>Quick write: Which male explorer do you most identify with now and why? It could be the same explorer you selected at the start of the reading, but your reasons ought to be varied. (Read chapters 7 and 8 of <em>Herland</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class 12 – January 30 (Wednesday), Day 1</td>
<td>Reading Quiz on <em>Herland</em>. (Read chapter 9 of <em>Herland</em>; Finish creative paper)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class 13 – February 4 (Monday), Day 3</td>
<td>Creative Paper Due. Quick write prompt: “In what ways are the women of <em>Herland</em> different from women in our society today? Be as specific as you can, using anecdotes from the text and real life to support your points.” Skits to demonstrate theories of gender. (Read chapter 10 of <em>Herland</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class 14 – February 5 (Tuesday), Day 4</td>
<td>Reading Quiz on <em>Herland</em>. Continue skits to demonstrate theories of gender. Critical paper assigned. (Generate a topic and library work for critical paper.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class 15 – February 7 (Thursday), Day 6</td>
<td>Library visit for literary criticism articles on <em>Herland</em></td>
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<td>February 11 (Monday)</td>
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Appendix I: *Herland* Writing Assignments

*Herland* Creative Writing Assignment

For your first writing assignment for *Herland*, you will adopt the perspective of one of the tutors, Somel, Zava, or Moadine, and offer her viewpoint on a specific event (or events) from the book.

To do this well, comb the text for references to your character as well as the male character she is assigned to tutor. In addition, you could glean information on the *Herland* women and their society in general and apply it to your character. In preparation for writing, ask yourself the guiding questions below. You should not strive to answer all of these; consider them food for thought, and feel free to extend beyond these.

- **How does your character feel about her student and why?** Does she like her student’s representation of her? (Remember that you don’t truly know the answer to this question, as you only get Van’s perspective on what the relationship is like.)

- **Although the women are respectful in their questioning, Van says they “work[ed] out a painfully accurate estimate of our conditions” (p. 81). How does your character view the information she is learning about society in the U.S.? What might be appealing or appalling to her? What might she be apathetic about?**

- **The middle chapters of the book give us more insight into this “utopia.” In what ways, though, might your character be critical of her own world, despite the united front the women all portray?**

This assignment is worth **100 pts.**, is due **Monday, February 4**, and must be typed, double-spaced, and stapled. As always, this paper should be as long as a string, but a good benchmark is three pages, particularly if you include dialogue. Have fun with it!
Herland Critical Writing Assignment

For your second writing assignment for Herland, you will write a critical paper involving **at least one secondary source**. Choose from one of the topics below *before* our library visit on Thursday so that you can conduct a strategic search for outside articles.

**Topic 1: The Male Explorers**
Charlotte Perkins Gilman uses the male characters to represent different versions of masculinity. What purpose do they serve in communicating her overall message of what an ideal “man” should be? For this topic, you could focus on one character or on all three.

**Topic 2: Theories of Gender**
We have discussed three major theories of gender, and these are all displayed throughout Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s Herland. Choose one of the theories and explain how it is exemplified throughout the story. Does this theory ultimately prove useful to the characters and/or society in the book?

**Topic 3: Utopic Society**
By definition, a utopia is “an imagined place or state of things in which everything is perfect.” Van gives the impression that Herland is the perfect place, but for this topic, adopt a more critical eye. In what ways is the society depicted in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s Herland far from perfect? Aside from the lack of men, would a world like this ever be possible?

The due dates for this **100 pt.** assignment are as follows:

- **Wednesday, February 6** – Decide on a topic.
- **Thursday, February 7** – Report directly to the library for a tutorial on the databases. Find **THREE** articles that could be pertinent to your topic. **15 pts.**
- **Tuesday, February 12** – Introduction paragraph due. Have a version of it with you in class. **15 pts.**
- **Wednesday, February 13** – Two body paragraphs due. **15 pts.**
- **Friday, February 15** – Complete draft of paper due. You must email it to me if you are absent. **100 pts.**
Appendix J: “I’m Still a Guy” Lyrics (by Brad Paisley)

When you see a deer, you see Bambi
And I see antlers up on the wall
When you see a lake you think picnics
And I see a large mouth up under that log

You're probably thinkin' that you're gonna change me
In some ways, well, maybe you might
Scrub me down, dress me up
Oh, but no matter what, remember, I'm still a guy

When you see a priceless friend's painting
I see a drunk naked girl
When you think that riding a wild bull sounds crazy
And I'd like to give it a whirl

Well, love makes a man do some things he ain't proud of
And in a weak moment I might
Walk your sissie dog, hold your purse at the mall
But remember, I'm still a guy

And I'll pour out my heart, hold your hand in the car
Write a love song that makes you cry
Then turn right around, knock some jerk to the ground
'Cause he copped a feel as you walked by

I can hear you now talkin' to your friends
Sayin' yeah, girls he's come a long way
From draggin' his knuckles and carryin' a club
And buildin' a fire in a cave

But when you say a back rub means only a back rub
Then you swat my hand when I try
Well, now what can I say at the end of the day
Honey, I'm still a guy

And I'll pour out my heart, hold your hand in the car
Write a love song that makes you cry
Then turn right around knock some jerk to the ground
'Cause he copped a feel as you walked by

These days there's dudes gettin' facials
Manicured, waxed and botoxed
With deep spray-on tans and creamy lotiony hands
You can't grip a tackle box

Yeah, with all of these men linin' up to get neutered
It's hip now to be feminized
But I don't highlight my hair, I've still got a pair
Yeah honey, I'm still a guy

Oh, my eyebrows ain't plucked, there's a gun in my truck
Oh thank God, I'm still a guy
Yeah boy